

## INTERVIEW OF BENIGNO R. FITIAL

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

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- Willens: Benigno R. Fitial served in the First Constitutional Convention and in a variety of public positions since then. Ben, thank you very much for being available, and I know you do have a cold. Would you give me your full name for the record.
- Fitial: Yes, sir. Benigno Repeki Fitial.
- Willens: Where were you born and educated?
- Fitial: I was born here in Saipan, and I attended the kindergarten better known today as Sister Remedios School and Mt. Carmel, both grade and high school, and graduated in 1964.
- Willens: From high school?
- Fitial: High school.
- Willens: So when were you born?
- Fitial: I was born November 27, 1945.
- Willens: Tell me a little bit about your parents. Were they both native to Saipan?
- Fitial: My father was born here in Saipan, although my mother was born in Alamagan. That's one of the islands north of Saipan. But they both grew up here in Saipan.
- Willens: What did your father do by way of employment?
- Fitial: My father worked for, they called it at that time, Microl. I really don't know much about that company. It was a private company at that time, and they were gathering and shipping scrap out of Saipan to outside destinations. Then my father changed jobs from that private company to the government, and he worked until his retirement with the Public Works—utilities.
- Willens: Where did you and your family live when you were growing up?
- Fitial: We lived in Chalan Kanoa, as everybody did at that time. It was centralized. All the people of Saipan I believe lived in Chalan Kanoa for a period of time until the outlying villages outside of Chalan Kanoa were cleared for human habitation. When I was going to grade school, I was living in Chalan Kanoa and later on moved to San Jose Oleai. My grandfather owned a big parcel of land in San Jose Oleai. In fact, the village today used to belong to my grandfather, and he exchanged that for a homestead with a parcel of mountainous land in upper Gualo Rai.
- Willens: I see. Did that piece of land stay in the family?
- Fitial: Yes. As a matter of fact, if you visit our upper land in Gualo Rai, you will see that there is now a chapel that my sister and the family built as a token to our grandfather.
- Willens: We happen to be renting a house in Gualo Rai, and you drive up past a few churches. We're renting from Gloria Sablan, the Governor's daughter, and you probably know where her townhouses are.
- Fitial: Well, if you're looking at your place from the oceanside, the chapel is situated to your right on top.

- Willens: Higher, higher up.
- Fitial: Higher up.
- Willens: When you were living in Chalan Kanoa, was there any segregation of Carolinian families from the Chamorro families, or were you all intermixed, as you recall it?
- Fitial: Interestingly, you know, I never noticed that there was that distinction, but there was. The Carolinians lived in District 4, which is one of the four districts in Chalan Kanoa, and the Chamorros were living in the other three districts (1, 2 and 3).
- Willens: How did that come about, do you know?
- Fitial: I really don't know. I guess because the Carolinians were more sea-daring at that time, and they lived close to the beaches.
- Willens: Well, I heard at one point that some of the most favorable or attractive land on the island of Saipan was given to some of the Carolinian families.
- Fitial: That's true.
- Willens: I don't quite know when that happened.
- Fitial: I don't know myself. But it turned out that we did, the Carolinians stayed close to the beach in District 4, and the Chamorros lived inland in Chalan Kanoa.
- Willens: Is there still a Carolinian concentration in District 4?
- Fitial: There still is today.
- Willens: And that has some political significance that we will come to.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: Could you help me understand the origin of the clan or utt, if I pronounce it correctly, concept within the Carolinian community? We've been told that there are five groupings or clans within the Carolinian community here. Is that correct, and how did they originate?
- Fitial: Well, I only learned about these clans much later in my upbringing. I learned from my parents and also from talking to the late Dr. Benisto Kaipat, one of our most prominent Carolinian leaders who passed away recently. When the Carolinians came to Saipan for settlement purposes, I believe there were five clans, mainly five clans. And these clans, which we call today "ailang", that's the Carolinian name for clan.
- Willens: Is it spelled like the word island?
- Fitial: No. Ailang is a-i-l-a-n-g, I guess. Ailang. And so when these first Carolinian settlers came into Saipan from the Caroline Islands, settled in Garapan, each ailang has its own utt, so there were five different utts.
- Willens: And what is an utt?
- Fitial: It's like a meeting place.
- Willens: That's the traditional formal meeting place that you see now constructed or reconstructed on Beach Road?
- Fitial: That's true. So each respective ailang will get together in their respective utt.
- Willens: You talk about it as though it was not an important part of your growing up. When

you were growing up, did you as a child go with your family to the utt for any sort of ceremonial occasion?

Fitial: When I was growing up, there was only one utt that we all went to.

Willens: All the five groups?

Fitial: All the Carolinians. In other words, the five utts, which I believe existed long before the outside influences such as the German, Spanish, Japanese, American era, have been disrupted. And we only came up with one utt. When I was growing up, I remember going to this one utt, and all the Carolinians go to this one utt for every large Carolinian meeting. And also for religious occasions, such as the San Isidro, the patron saint of Saipan. You know, every year in May, we go to this utt to pray, and after nine days, we have a big celebration. And right outside of this utt, there will be Carolinian traditional dances, performances, and everybody will be gathered around this utt in Chalan Kanoa before. Now this utt, there is still one in Chalan Kanoa, but it's rarely used now as a meeting place except for religious occasions, San Isidro. The one that is now used politically is the one that is located in Garapan, right next to Hafa Adai Hotel.

Willens: I see. Did the Chamorro community also celebrate the May festival?

Fitial: Yes. They celebrate along with the Carolinians, but for some reason it's the Carolinians who are tasked with the responsibility to prepare the celebration, and it seems like they host this annual religious occasion. And the Chamorros would join in, but they play a minor role in the preparation of this religious occasion.

Willens: Did the five groups have their origins back in the Caroline Islands.

Fitial: I was told that, and I learned from talking to Dr. Kaipat, that the five ailang are well established in the Caroline Islands. And everybody, like every Carolinian on Saipan today, knows what clan they belong to.

Willens: Now have you as an adult gone back to the Caroline Islands from time to time and met with the clan members there?

Fitial: No. I've never been there, but fortunately we have these sea-daring Carolinians who are still residing in the Caroline Islands on the island of Satoa, where supposedly my ancestors came from. They come up here every year for this annual religious occasion.

Willens: Is that the group that comes by canoes?

Fitial: Yes. They come in canoes.

Willens: I've heard about that. They still do that?

Fitial: They still do that. As a matter of fact, the remaining traditional navigator, his name is very popular today because of his achievement in Hawaii, where he sailed a canoe called Hokalea in Hawaii. There's a book that was written on that, from Hawaii to Tahiti. And incidentally, he happens to be a very close relative of ours.

Willens: He's still alive?

Fitial: He's still alive. His name is Peiluk. They call him Mau in that book.

Willens: Where does he live?

Fitial: He lives in Satoa. And he's the one who showed me, and I learned a lot from him, about my family ancestry. And we happen to come from the same family tree.

Willens: How long of a canoe trip is it that they make every spring, from the Carolines to here?

- Fitial: According to Peiluk, it normally takes five days and five nights if the weather permits, if the weather is good.
- Willens: How many miles are we talking about?
- Fitial: Oh, we're talking about close to 500 miles.
- Willens: Without any modern navigation as a guide?
- Fitial: Nothing.
- Willens: They simply do it by the stars and the currents and the wind and some innate sense.
- Fitial: Right. They call it celestial navigation, you know, in the modern sense of the word.
- Willens: After you graduated from high school in 1964, did you then become employed on Saipan?
- Fitial: No, I went to college. I went to the University of Guam, and I went to other universities in the States, but I finally graduated from the University of Guam.
- Willens: When did you graduate from the University of Guam?
- Fitial: I graduated in 1976.
- Willens: And which universities did you attend in the United States?
- Fitial: I also went to U.C. Davis, Nebraska, and a semester in Mexico at the University of Senora.
- Willens: Now how did it happen that you had such a varied educational career?
- Fitial: I loved to travel. When I was still young, very young, and I guess right now I'm still doing a lot of traveling. It's sort of my ambition to travel a lot when I was still young.
- Willens: Did you enjoy the experience of education in the United States?
- Fitial: I did. I really did.
- Willens: What did you end up majoring in?
- Fitial: I majored in business management.
- Willens: Were you away from the island for a substantial number of years then in the 1960s and the early 1970s?
- Fitial: I went to school, then I came back, then I worked for the government for a few years, then I went back to school. Then after graduation, I came back and I worked again for the Trust Territory government. Whenever I refer to the government, I mean the Trust Territory government.
- Willens: What was your first job with the Trust Territory government?
- Fitial: I was a news director at the radio station—KJQR it was called.
- Willens: Who was running that office at the time?
- Fitial: My first cousin named Felix Rabauliman was the radio station manager.
- Willens: Felix Rabauliman is your first cousin?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: Ah. Sounds like nepotism.
- Fitial: Well, I guess at that time, you know, that word was not really a problem, because we have

very little manpower resources at that time. So you couldn't possibly accuse my first cousin of nepotism, because there weren't too many, I would say, qualified news directors to work for the radio station at that time.

Willens: When was that then? Was that in the 1960s?

Fitial: Yes. 1967.

Willens: After you graduated from high school, you went away right away to college for a year or two, then you came back and worked for the TTPI news operation—for a couple of years?

Fitial: Just for a year. Then I was reassigned from the Department of Public Affairs, which oversees the radio station, to the Department of Administration. And then I worked as a budget analyst in the Budget Office since 1968 until 1975.

Willens: 1968 to 1975. Did you not go to school then during that period?

Fitial: No. Then I went back to school in 1975. I graduated in 1976. Then I came back and worked for the Budget Office again from 1976 until 1978, when the commonwealth government in the Marianas came into being. Then I transferred to the CNMI on the very first day, January 9, 1978. And I worked for the Commonwealth Legislature as the budget officer for the first Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. Then I got elected into the second Commonwealth Legislature, and I remained as a Congressman until 1988.

Willens: So you were in the Legislature then from ....

Fitial: From 1978 until 1988.

Willens: You were an elected official for three terms?

Fitial: For four terms.

Willens: For four two-year terms in the House of Representatives.

Fitial: Yes. Four two-year terms in the House. At that time, I also served as Speaker of the House of Representatives for the Third Legislature.

Willens: Let's see. That would have been....

Fitial: 1982 to 1984.

Willens: Going back to your work for the TTPI, I have had the occasion recently to interview Jon Anderson, who came into that operation I guess several years later. What did you have within the public affairs office other than a radio station at that time? Were there publications that were put out by the TTPI?

Fitial: Right. There was a PIO, Public Information Office, that's within the Department of Public Affairs. We have the government printing shop under the Department of Public Affairs. And we have the Legislative Affairs Office or Division under the Department of Public Affairs.

Willens: Was the office run by an expatriate at the time?

Fitial: Right. The office was run by Neiman Craley.

Willens: He's the former congressman who served out here for many years.

Fitial: Yes.

- Willens: I have talked with many of our mutual friends about the Trust Territory government in the late 1960s. Did you have any dealings with the Congress of Micronesia in the course of your work?
- Fitial: Yes. I used to cover the Congressional sessions.
- Willens: It was during the period of 1967 to 1969 when the Congress of Micronesia formed its Future Political Status Commission, and they issued a report. Dr. Palacios and others served on that Commission and issued a report in 1969 that advocated free association for all of Micronesia or, in the alternative, independence. Did you know the members of the Future Political Status Commission?
- Fitial: Yes. The Micronesian Political Status Commission. I was already in Budget at that time. But before the formation of the Micronesian Political Status Commission, I was still a news director. In fact, the Micronesian News Service was established when I was still in radio, and I became one of the correspondents, so-called, for the Micronesian News Service, and Jon Anderson was also a member. In fact, he was the one in charge of the Micronesian News Service after I had transferred to the Department of Administration to work in the Budget Office. But I was familiar with the concept and the formation of the Micronesian Political Status Commission before transferring to the Budget Office.
- Willens: Did you personally have any views at the time as to what kind of future political status seemed to be the most attractive to you?
- Fitial: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, I was leaning towards supporting the free association status.
- Willens: Do you think that the report of the Commission was a good report?
- Fitial: I really think so. And I really believe that if the Micronesian islands would have stuck together and opted to become a free association, I really believe that that particular status would have been much, much better than what it is today.
- Willens: Did you have a close personal relationship with Dr. Palacios?
- Fitial: Yes. Very, very close. As a matter of fact, well, you know when we had the First Constitutional Convention to put together the Constitution for the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, Dr. Palacios and I served on that Constitutional Convention.
- Willens: Did you know him several years earlier when he was a member of the Congress of Micronesia?
- Fitial: Yes. I knew him several years earlier when he was a member of the Congress of Micronesia and when he was President of the Republican Party. Under him, I was his Vice-president.
- Willens: When was that?
- Fitial: This was before the Constitutional Convention.
- Willens: What was Dr. Palacios' role in the Carolinian community?
- Fitial: Well, he was well revered as one of the members of the higher clan.
- Willens: Did the clans have some hierarchy?
- Fitial: Yes. In Carolinian, we have, we call it "ailang samole," it means high clan. And we have the regular clans, and Dr. Palacios was a member of one of the "ailang samole."

- Willens: Was there in fact any single person who was sort of the leader of the entire Carolinian community, or did you have five different leaders of each of the clans?
- Fitial: There was no one leader, or maybe I should say there was no one clan which was looked upon as the leading clan of the Carolinians. They were only referred to in a respectful way, you know, to revere these particular people who belonged to the “ailang samole,” but there was no one particular Carolinian who was referred to as “the” leader of the Carolinians. A few Carolinians, when I was still young, for example, the late Elias P. Sablan—his name is Chamorro, but he is a Carolinian—and he was also very well respected by the Carolinians, but he was no way claimed as the one Carolinian leader.
- Willens: Yes, I’ve interviewed his son, David, and we spent some time talking about his father’s leadership role in the community. In the late 1960s, what was your personal assessment of the way that the Trust Territory Administration was serving the needs of the Micronesians?
- Fitial: Well, being in the Budget Office, I was privy to a lot of information concerning the development of the Micronesian islands, in terms of budget. And we were always limited in terms of grants from the U.S. Congress. And I really don’t know why our budget for the Trust Territory government was always limited every year. In other words, I would like to clarify this by saying that as a budget analyst at that time, I was always trying to work with reduced budget allocations. Every year, the cost of running the Trust Territory government increases.
- Willens: Is that just because of the normal factor of inflation?
- Fitial: I believe that’s one of the reasons, and that’s one of the clear reasons to me why the budget allocations or allotments to the different islands were always consistently reduced. It is because of the inflationary factor.
- Willens: But this was a decade between the early 1960s and the early 1970s when the United States Congress substantially increased the budget for the Trust Territory. The Kennedy Administration made a decision in the early 1960s to adopt a new policy for Micronesia, and the budget increased from \$6 or \$7 million a year to \$15 million, then increased to \$30 million, and by the time you were in the Budget Office, it must have been up around \$60 or \$70 million.
- Fitial: That’s true.
- Willens: Is it your view that, even though there were those increases, it still was too little funds to really address the infrastructure needs, meet the needs here that you saw?
- Fitial: That’s true. It’s funny, because the annual appropriation continues to increase, but the needs were never met. In other words, there’s always need for infrastructure development in all of the islands. And these needs to me cannot be met because of lack of adequate funding.
- Willens: Did you think that the High Commissioner in the years that you served in the Trust Territory was an effective advocate for the Trust Territory?
- Fitial: Well, you know, Howard, I look at it this way. When the High Commissioner goes to Washington, D.C., he would go before the U.S. Congressional budget committees to justify a given amount already. And that’s what I mean. Those given amounts every year don’t seem to adequately provide for the real needs.
- Willens: Do you think he was more or less given that amount by the Interior Department?

- Fitial: Yes. Those amounts were given already. In other words, the Interior Department has a budget, a given budget, an authorized ceiling, see? That's the thing, that's the thing about the Trust Territory government budget at that time, that we always have a ceiling, and we cannot exceed those ceilings unless the Congressional committees change those authorized ceilings.
- Willens: Did you personally ever meet with members of the Office of Territories in the Interior Department?
- Fitial: I was part of the High Commissioner's budget delegation to Washington several times.
- Willens: During the years you were in the Trust Territory, the Office of Territories was headed by Ruth Van Cleve for some years in the middle-1960s until the Republicans came in 1969, and then I think Stanley Carpenter became the Director of Territorial Affairs or some such title. Do you remember dealing with either Mrs. Van Cleve or Mr. Carpenter?
- Fitial: I never dealt with Mrs. Van Cleve until recently when President Carter appointed me Chairman of the Commission on Federal Laws.
- Willens: She had come back into the Interior Department.
- Fitial: She had come back, yes, as an advisor.
- Willens: Did you meet with Mr. Carpenter or any other Interior Department official?
- Fitial: Yes. I met with Carpenter, together with the High Commissioner, and our Trust Territory government delegation.
- Willens: What was your assessment of his interest in the Trust Territory and his ability to get funds that were needed here for the Trust Territory?
- Fitial: Well, I cannot give an objective assessment of Mr. Carpenter's real interest, because I did not see any when I went Washington with the High Commissioner and met with him. But everybody was always trying to grab as much as they can grab from the pie that has already been allocated to the Interior Department. And when it comes to budget justification time, everybody tries to justify whatever piece of the pie he has been given or allocated.
- Willens: How was it decided within the Trust Territory as to what share of the funds should go to the Northern Marianas district as compared with the Marshalls, or Yap, or Palau? How were those decisions made as to how to treat the individual districts?
- Fitial: Oh, this came about from when I was in the Budget Office, the Congress of Micronesia has played a role in the budgetary process for the Trust Territory government. So the Congress of Micronesia would first conduct hearings to determine how much of the Trust Territory government budget would be allocated to the various respective districts.
- Willens: Would your office, subject to review by the High Commissioner, propose a draft budget and then submit it to the Congress for its evaluation?
- Fitial: That's right. That was the process at that time. We would draft a proposal to the Congress of Micronesia, then the Congress of Micronesia would bring in all these district administrators, as at that time they were called, to Saipan, and would hear their testimonies or justifications, and then they will put together a final report on their recommendations and submit it to the High Commissioner. And that would be the package, the High Commissioner's budget to the Interior Department.
- Willens: Would the Congress be looking at monies that were raised locally and also the money that they hoped to be obtained from the United States government?

- Fitial: That's true. In other words, there is already an amount that is recognized to have been raised locally, and that amount would also be, not commingled, but be incorporated into the Trust Territory government budget.
- Willens: Most of it came from the U.S. Congress.
- Fitial: Yes. And still, a lot of the money for the budget comes from the U.S. Congress.
- Willens: As the Congress of Micronesia in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to assume those responsibilities, I've seen some evidence in the documents that there was growing controversy over such matters as revenue allocation and taxation. In particular, the Marshall Islands in several sessions of the Congress of Micronesia tried unsuccessfully to get legislation enacted that would obligate the Trust Territory government to return 50% or some such amount of the revenues raised to the districts in which they were raised. I may not have defined it correctly, but there was a debate of this kind that went on, is that correct?
- Fitial: That's correct.
- Willens: Did you think that the process within the Congress of Micronesia became a divisive one that illustrated the differences among the districts?
- Fitial: Well, there was always that claim by the district delegations. For example, the Marshall Islands, or Palau for that matter, would want to have most of the revenues that they raised locally be returned to their respective districts for use. But I guess it showed, Howard, that that was an indication, the revenue was an indicator to me that even at that time, the Micronesians were not really cohesive, because they would still fight over money, where the money should be used.
- Willens: Well, that's what I wanted to explore with you, because there were many eloquent speeches in the Congress of Micronesia by Lazarus Salii and the leaders from many of the other islands on the issue of Micronesian unity. And in the late 1960s when the Future Status Commission report issued, it looked as though unity was achievable. But in the subsequent years, when issues like revenue allocation arose, the so-called prosperous Districts—the Marshalls, Palau and the Marianas—seemed to have strong differences with the less well endowed districts of Yap and Ponape.
- Fitial: That's the way I saw it then. I saw at that time when the budgetary process involved the Congress of Micronesia, I saw that the money issue was already an indication to me that it would be difficult for the islands to harmoniously work together, because they were fighting over the money issue so strongly that at times they would utter phrases that would be unbecoming of a nation to be, you know, people getting together to become one nation.
- Willens: Some of our mutual friends emphasized also what they perceived to be the cultural and other differences between the districts. Some suggested the differences in language, the differences in the role of tribal chiefs, operated to distinguish the Northern Marianas in particular from several of the other districts. Do you think those cultural differences were significant in the late 1960s and the early 1970s?
- Fitial: Perhaps so, but you know as a citizen of the Northern Marianas, I did not see it that way, because I, like any other citizen of the Northern Marianas, would say that the Northern Marianas were more accommodating. I mean, the Northern Marianas was more accommodating to secure this unity. In other words, we were sacrificing more, the Northern Marianas were sacrificing more, to achieve this unity among the Micronesians than the other islands.

- Willens: That's an interesting observation. What are you thinking of as evidence of the willingness on the part of the Marianas leadership to contribute to Micronesian unity?
- Fitial: Well, the money issue, one. You know, we have that attitude of compromise. In other words, we would give this time, and then we expect to receive next time. The other districts—I don't see that attitude in them.
- Willens: That's a generous thought that I associate with the Carolinian community. Do you feel it was also shared by the political leadership on the Chamorro side?
- Fitial: I agree with you. The Carolinians are that way. You find that attitude mainly in the Carolinians. And I guess that's why I'm talking this way, because I am one. But generally speaking, you know, the Marianas was more accommodating than the other islands.
- Willens: One of the other differences that comes up regularly is that the Northern Marianas people, particularly the Chamorro community, attached a high value to U.S. citizenship. This seems to result in part from the historic desire to reintegrate with Guam. I've seen some evidence and experienced some reluctance on the part of the Carolinian community to achieve U.S. citizenship. Do you think that U.S. citizenship as an objective was a factor that distinguished the Northern Marianas group as a whole from the other Districts?
- Fitial: Unfortunately so. And the historical background on the Northern Marianas would show that there was an overwhelming support for becoming U.S. citizens. And I guess because the majority of the people here in the Marianas are Chamorros, and they feel very close to their relatives in Guam, that was probably the main reason why that overwhelming support for U.S. citizenship came about at that time. But I would also say that it is largely due to ignorance. Had the people of the Northern Marianas been more educated and more knowledgeable as to the impact, the effect, of that particular support would have brought about at this time, you know, I am certain that their decision would have been otherwise.
- Willens: Well, I don't understand that point.
- Fitial: In other words, you know, this is largely my feeling, that the people of the Northern Marianas were forced to make a decision on their political status when they were not really informed. In other words, they were shooting blanks. They were not really given the opportunity to understand fully what happened if they choose to become part of the United States.
- Willens: But during the 1960s and even earlier, there were many plebiscites conducted here in the Northern Marianas and resolutions adopted by the District Legislature urging reintegration with Guam and a separate political status for the Northern Marianas. Is it your sense that those resolutions and votes were not based on an adequate understanding of what the status alternatives were?
- Fitial: I really believe so, Howard. I think the people of the Northern Marianas at that time were forced to make a premature decision on their political status. What I mean is that they were not fully aware of the impact, the effect that would result from becoming U.S. citizens. And I guess at that time it really didn't matter to most of the people because the campaign, the propaganda, at that time was it was better to become U.S. citizens than to remain part of the Trust Territory and still be part of these Micronesians. The term "Micronesian" for most of the Chamorros had a bad connotation.
- Willens: I have heard some uncomplimentary things said about the way in which the Chamorros viewed the people of the other districts. And it was your recollection that they sort of looked down on the people of the other districts.

- Fitial: In other words, they were looking at the social [aspects], and they were being emotional about the issue, instead of looking at it objectively long-term. They should be looking at the economic considerations, because let's face it, the \$14 million that our negotiators agreed to lease the lands in the Northern Marianas, to me, was grossly understated.
- Willens: Well, the status issue came to a head in 1970 or thereabouts when the Micronesians had established a delegation from the Congress of Micronesia to negotiate with the United States, and there came a time when the United States made a proposal which they called a Commonwealth Proposal in 1970 to the Congress of Micronesia delegation. It was rejected by the Congress of Micronesia for good reason. But at that point, the Marianas representatives in the Congress, including Senator Borja and others, suggested that maybe the Commonwealth Proposal was something that was closer to what the people of the Northern Marianas wanted. And that became a crucial point at which the Northern Marianas political leadership seemed to decide to go on a separate route from the other districts. Do you have any recollection of that set of events?
- Fitial: Yes. And see, Howard, you mentioned, you use a word there "maybe" that's what the people of the Northern Marianas want. There was no real discussion among the people of the Northern Marianas as to what they really want. They were forced to make a choice in those plebiscites without really having the benefit of discussing and understanding those options.
- Willens: A lot of people have told me that the Chamorros at least here basically looked upon Guam as the big city, they saw more economic development on Guam, they saw higher pay scales on Guam, they saw free entry into the United States, they saw better educational facilities, and they would respond to you and say, well, you didn't have to have a lot of meetings to know that things looked better on Guam than they were here at the time.
- Fitial: You see, because they were short-sighted. You know, those people who thought that way, they viewed the situation in the Northern Marianas at that time as that was the only way that the Northern Marianas would stay, which I totally disagree. I think that they were not really thinking long-term. They were not considering the potentials—the economic potentials of the Northern Marianas at that time. They never believed that the Northern Marianas could become what it is today. They thought that the Northern Marianas would continue to be underdeveloped and primitive the way it used to be in the early 1960s. That was the thing that drove most of the people in the Northern Marianas to choose to become part of the United States.
- Willens: The Northern Marianas leadership at least seemed to be in favor of faster economic development. Did you share that view in the late 1960s and early 1970s?
- Fitial: Yes. I shared that, Howard, and evidence of that, I was the one who, when I was the Speaker of the Legislature, introduced a bill that repealed the Foreign Investment Act of the Trust Territory.
- Willens: I've heard that that was a very important step, and I wondered why it was that the Commonwealth government did not repeal that restrictive Micronesian law until 1983 or thereabouts.
- Fitial: Right.
- Willens: Why was the new Commonwealth government reluctant to change that law?
- Fitial: I don't know. But what I know is that it was a deterring factor for CNMI economic development.

- Willens: Well, in 1974, Secretary Morton changed U.S. policy, the most favored nations provision, or the interpretation of it, and the initial reaction from the members of the Congress of Micronesia who were from the Marianas, which included at the time the future Governor Pedro P. Tenorio and Ed Pangelinan, made on the whole favorable comments, although they were somewhat concerned about exercising control over foreign investment here. In the early 1970s, when Secretary Morton changed the policy, did you and others look forward to having more foreign investment in these islands?
- Fitial: Yes. I believe that this is a necessity. The Northern Marianas needs not only foreign investment, but foreign labor as well.
- Willens: Well, do you think that the other districts shared that view in favor of fast economic development?
- Fitial: I don't know what the other districts felt at that time. But I knew this, because I was in the Budget Office, and this was a deterring factor to the economic development of the Northern Marianas. So when I became a legislator, when I became the Speaker, I caused the repeal of Title 33 of the Trust Territory Code.
- Willens: What do you think were the other important factors limiting economic development in the Marianas in the late 1960s and the early 1970s? You mentioned that it was almost primitive in the early 1960s, and certainly that is a fair description. By the early 1970s, there were plans afoot for what became the Saipan Continental and then ultimately the Intercontinental Hotel. It became operational I guess in 1975 or 1976. But in addition to the restrictions on foreign investment, what were the limiting factors here in the Marianas in the late 1960s or early 1970s?
- Fitial: The main thing, economically, because it restricts foreign investment, *per se*. And the favored nation clause provides for U.S. companies or U.S. businesses to come in and do business in the Commonwealth without any restriction. We saw it was obvious that there were very, very few U.S. companies coming here to establish their businesses. So to me and to some of my colleagues in the Third Legislature, it was very obvious that it was probably economically difficult for U.S. corporations or companies to come and establish their businesses here in the Commonwealth. That's why we wanted to remove that restriction and allow foreign investment to come in, because when we looked around, all the hotels here are Japanese owned, and we were very fortunate to have some Japanese companies come in here and establish all these developments.
- Willens: Just one more question on that point. One of the studies that was done here in the middle 1960s was done by the Nathan Associates Group, and Jim Leonard, who later became an economic consultant to the Commission, was on that group. One of the points that study made was that the uncertainty about future political status was a detriment or obstacle to bringing investment to the island. Other people now have told me that the status of the Commonwealth as part of the United States is one of its principal advantages in attracting foreign investment. Do you share that view?
- Fitial: Well, I have discussed that particular concern with other political leaders here on the island. I don't know, Howard, maybe some people feel comfortable coming here, I mean foreigners coming here, to invest when they see that we are flying the U.S. flag.
- Willens: People make reference to the court system and U.S. laws as providing some stability and some guarantee of fair enforcement to foreign investors.
- Fitial: Yes. That's why I started to express my own opinion on that particular view. Personally, I look at it differently, since the entrepreneur would only look at his bottom line. If he

can come in here and secure an investment that would yield a return to him, those other things are secondary.

Willens: That certainly makes basic economic sense. The drive toward separate negotiations and becoming part of the United States was very much organized and managed by leaders of the Popular Party in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and the District Legislature was predominantly run by the Popular Party. When did you first become politically affiliated with the Territorial Party?

Fitial: I was still a minor. I was still underage when the two-party system came into being here in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. And I was always an active member of the Republican Party, which was called the Progressive, the Territorial Party before.

Willens: Is that because your family was? I realize that the Progressive Party when it first was established offered a home for the Carolinian community. Was one of the founders from the Carolinian community—founders of the Progressive Party?

Fitial: Yes. It was Dr. Kaipat. Dr. Kaipat was one of the founders. But the real founders were Joeten and the Pangelinan family. They're still very strong today.

Willens: So you were always part of the Territorial Party once you became of voting age.

Fitial: Right.

Willens: Did you become active in political affairs?

Fitial: Yes. I was always active in the political elections and campaigning for the Territorial and now the Republican Party.

Willens: The Territorial Party in the late 1960s did take a position in favor of separate status negotiations and direct affiliation with the United States.

Fitial: Yes, direct annexation by the United States.

Willens: And the irony of the matter is that the Territorial Party approach essentially was the one that finally was adopted.

Fitial: That's true.

Willens: Because the Popular Party alternative was rejected by the people of Guam.

Fitial: Voted down by Guam, yes.

Willens: So did you, as you became an active member of the Territorial Party, disagree within the party councils as to the desirability of affiliation with the United States?

Fitial: No. I did not disagree. I always believed that the ultimate political status of the Northern Marianas should, in one way or the other, be in association or affiliation with the United States. That's my personal belief. But my only disagreement is that it was premature. I always think that it was premature to get into that arrangement when the people are not ready. I really believe that the people were not ready, the people were not fully informed of the effect, the impact of that particular arrangement as agreed upon. In other words, the \$14 million would not have been \$14 million if it were looked at more on an informed basis between the two parties. That's the way I always think. But bottom line, ultimately, my personal choice would be to become in one way or another associated with the United States.

Willens: But you suggested earlier that your personal choice also was, if possible, to stay with the other parts of Micronesia.

Fitial: Right. Because I always believe, and this is from going to school, that when we are united, we have leverage.

Willens: That's certainly true. It's a view shared by many of our mutual friends. In 1972, though, events led to a request for separate status negotiations with the United States, and the United States agreed in 1972. Did you react favorably to that decision to have separate negotiations, or did you think that was a mistake?

Fitial: That was a mistake, I think. I voiced it out to many of our mutual friends that that was a big mistake. Any fragmentation of the Trust Territory unity would result in a big mistake and loss to the parties involved.

Willens: Do you think that the so-called fragmentation was the result of deliberate U.S. policy, or do you think it resulted from the years of petitions by the Northern Marianas political leadership?

Fitial: Well, I came across the Solomon Report, and I suspected that this was a making or a doing of the U.S. In other words, the U.S. could have fought very hard to prevent fragmentation, but on the other hand, it was very receptive to accommodate the cry for separate negotiations.

Willens: They certainly could have turned it down, that's right.

Fitial: Yes.

Willens: One of the interesting things about the Solomon Commission report and the myths that are associated with it is that it was designed to implement a secret U.S. policy from the early 1960s to make all of Micronesia part of the United States. And the Kennedy Administration decided that if they emphasized education here, built up the economy and infrastructure, that they might have a goal of a plebiscite as early as 1967 or 1968 at which time the majority of Micronesians might vote to become part of the United States, perhaps as an unincorporated territory like Guam. Now that policy never got implemented, but let's fantasize here together. Let's assume there had been a vote in 1967 or 1968 throughout all of Micronesia about whether the people wanted to become part of the United States. Do you think that a majority of the Micronesians would have voted for that affiliation?

Fitial: I really don't know what the other Micronesians would have voted for. But certainly the people of the Northern Marianas would have voted for becoming U.S. citizens. But let me also say this with regard to the Solomon Report. That report was designed to keep the unity, but in such a way that the unity would continue to rely heavily on the U.S. financial assistance.

Willens: I think that's true. And the other interesting aspect of it is assuming that the U.S. policies had been successful and all the people had voted to become part of the United States in 1968, would it have survived the next 15 years as people became more educated, more politically sophisticated, or would you have ultimately had the fragmentation that developed?

Fitial: It would be very difficult for the unity to survive under that policy if there had not been any modification. In other words, modify the policy to allow for foreign investments. In other words, repeal Title 33 and keep the unity under a different scenario as opposed to the Trust Territory time.

Willens: Some of the differences that developed between the districts, which resulted in the

Marshalls and Palau going their independent ways, might have developed within the confines of a unified Micronesia.

Fitial: I agree. I don't care what internal conflicts developed within the unity, if that unity is maintained, I'm sure that it would become much stronger, if the parties involved were able to fight out their internal problems among themselves. Because by doing that, they would really understand each other. That's the way I see it. They would come to really appreciate one another by solving their own internal conflicts.

Willens: There certainly were debates along that line in the early 1970s within the Congress of Micronesia, and ultimately some of the leaders decided that the only way to preserve unity would be to have a very weak central government and let the individual districts have broad control over their own finances, over their own economic development, and that the only way to achieve unity would be to delegate most of the powers of government to the districts. That might have provided a framework to keep the districts together and perhaps over time they would have worked out some of the problems that you referred to and strengthened the central government.

Fitial: Well, I disagree with giving more powers to the district government, because that would only weaken the unity. Because that is not unity. Unity is supporting one central government. That's why the Micronesians were never given the chance to develop trust, real trust. We were called Trust Territory, but there was no trust among the Micronesians. And had we been given the chance, the Micronesians been given the chance to develop that trust and work within that trust, I am sure that they will not provide a framework that would delegate the powers to the district governments. Instead, they would really emphasize strengthening the central government had this trust been developed properly and accordingly.

Willens: When the Marianas Political Status Commission was created by the Legislature, there was one seat on the Commission that was to be filled by an appointee of the United Carolinian Association. What was the United Carolinian Association at the time?

Fitial: The United Carolinian Association was a social group comprised of influential, respected members of the Carolinian community here in Saipan.

Willens: There were representatives in the Association from each of the five groups?

Fitial: Yes. Not only each of the five groups—we tried to get representation from each, what do you call these, extension of these five groups.

Willens: Well, could anyone be a member of the United Carolinian Association?

Fitial: Anybody.

Willens: ... who was Carolinian?

Fitial: Yes. As a matter of fact, every Carolinian was a member of the United Carolinian Association.

Willens: When was it formed, if you remember? Was it formed before you became an active political member?

Fitial: Like I said, I was active in politics ever since the first two parties came into being. The United Carolinian Association (UCA) came into being years later, after the two parties came into being.

Willens: In the 1960s sometime?

- Fitial: Yes. I would say late 1960s.
- Willens: And did you play a role in the decision to have such an organization?
- Fitial: Yes. I was an active member. In fact, I was an incorporator.
- Willens: Why did you think it would be desirable to have such an organization?
- Fitial: To have a voice, to have leverage in the political development of the Northern Marianas.
- Willens: Then did the Association provide a vehicle where the leaders of the five groups could try to develop a common position on behalf of the Carolinian community?
- Fitial: Yes. Mainly it was designed to foster, what do you call this, more of a social than a political [purpose]. But I guess, because the community is so small, it's inevitable that such an Association would tend to play a political role also.
- Willens: About how large would you estimate the Carolinian community was in the late 1960s and the early 1970s?
- Fitial: About 5,000.
- Willens: About 5,000. How did it come to be that Felix Rabauliman was designated to be a member of the Commission?
- Fitial: Well, I guess by meeting of the minds.
- Willens: He was an educator at the time, was that correct?
- Fitial: Right. I guess like any other Saipanese, anyone at that time who is educated was also respected.
- Willens: Did you consider making yourself available for that position?
- Fitial: No. Because I was very young at that time. Not only educated, you have to be elderly.
- Willens: Have to be what?
- Fitial: An elder.
- Willens: When does one become an elder, I've asked. I guess when one gets gray hair.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: After Felix became a member of the Commission, did you and the other leaders within the Carolinian community meet with him from time to time to get his report as to what the Commission was doing?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: When he sat as a member of the Commission, was he authorized to represent views of the Carolinian community?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: And did you have confidence that he would do that?
- Fitial: Definitely.
- Willens: Shortly after the negotiations began, Dr. Palacios and two other members of the Commission gave an interview suggesting some reservations about the way in which the negotiations were going. In June of 1973, Dr. Palacios, Joeten, and Felix Rabauliman gave an interview that was widely publicized in the *Pacific Daily News*. They suggested that the negotiations were going too fast, that the Marianas Political Status Commission was

unprepared in contrast with the U.S. delegation, and that questions of sovereignty were very difficult and delicate. Did you talk to Felix, Joeten or Dr. Palacios as a group about expressing those views?

Fitial: I did, the Republican Party also did, and the United Carolinian [Association] also did with Felix. As you said, we felt at that time that the negotiations were going much too fast, and as you said, we felt also that the Commission was not prepared to discuss those particular issues that were discussed during the negotiations, particularly the sovereignty issue. Because according to these gentlemen that were representing us, not only the Carolinians, Felix, but also Dr. Palacios, they also felt the same way. And we agreed with what they felt, because we not only felt it, but we somehow understand that we were not prepared, really, to be discussing those issues, particularly the sovereignty issue.

Willens: Do you think that Joeten shared those views that there was a need for more time and more education?

Fitial: Yes. Joeten, time and time, repeatedly said that we are still not prepared. We still need more time to learn more about the status.

Willens: One of the interesting aspects about that question, to me, is that at the same time that he and others wanted more time and more education, you also were very critical of the Trust Territory government in terms of providing education and the opportunity for more political development. I guess my question to you is, how did you think that more time would produce more political education of the kind that would help the citizens make a more informed decision?

Fitial: Well, we need more education. More time means to me we did not have the brains that we now have today at that time. At that time, we only had very, very few people with college educations, who not only were articulate but also, I don't want to say this, but we feel that some of those people representing the people on the Commission were not really sincere. This is the way I feel. Were not really sincere to try to secure the best terms in the agreement.

Willens: Why would that not be in everyone's interest? Do you think they had some personal motive or economic interest involved?

Fitial: Not economic interest, but I guess personal, like some of our representatives have already expressed that this is the only political status that we can secure, to give us the best benefit in the long run. So that was a statement. Now he wants to deliver that statement. So barring the uncertainties of the status that we were going into, to become part of the United States, the foremost [thing] in his mind was to deliver the commonwealth status.

Willens: Well, that's certainly true. The Marianas District Legislature authorized the creation of the Marianas Political Status Commission and gave it a very specific direction—to negotiate a close and permanent relationship with the United States. And I discussed this with Governor Guerrero just recently, and he agreed that under that authorizing legislation, the Commission had a single objective in mind. It sort of left behind the alternatives of free association and other political status alternatives that you and others think might have been more attractive or should have been given more consideration.

Fitial: Maybe that was also a mistake, to single out one political status to negotiate.

Willens: Did you know Joe Screen?

Fitial: Very well. He was my boss when I transferred from Neiman Craley to the administration.

- Willens: Do you recall what Mr. Screen's views were about political status?
- Fitial: Oh, yes. He was always telling me that right now, you people are very important. This is his famous statement: "I have to be nice to you, because you people are important." But once you become U.S., like me, up yours.
- Willens: That does remind me of Joe Screen. And was it his view that the local people were important because the U.S. had an interest in at least two-thirds of Tinian?
- Fitial: Yes. In other words, our location, our strategic location here at that time, was important to the United States.
- Willens: I've heard it suggested that many people in the Trust Territory government were not in favor of the separate political negotiations for the Northern Marianas and that in part they may have seen it as a challenge to their continuing to serve as employees of the Trust Territory government. Did you have any reaction as an employee of the Trust Territory government as to how people that you worked with thought about the Northern Marianas negotiations?
- Fitial: No, not really. I never came across any expatriate employee of the Trust Territory government at that time who would try to express his opinion in such a way that would be self-revealing.
- Willens: Were there too many expatriates up there?
- Fitial: There were quite a few.
- Willens: For years, it was declared to be U.S. policy to train Micronesians to assume senior management positions in the Trust Territory government. Did that policy ever get implemented?
- Fitial: Yes. It was called the Micronization policy, and although it came down hard on certain expatriate employees of the Trust Territory government at that time, it was a policy that was designed and intended to be implemented, and it was implemented.
- Willens: You think it was implemented in a conscientious way by the Trust Territory?
- Fitial: Yes. I believe so, and all the District Administrators were Micronesians. Before the policy was implemented, the District Administrators were all expatriates. So gradually they were replaced by Micronesians. And top positions in the headquarters here in Saipan, before the policy was implemented, were filled by expatriates.
- Willens: Did you see this being implemented while you were in the Department of Public Affairs, or was it later when you were working for the Department of Administration that you think it was implemented?
- Fitial: When I was in the Administration.
- Willens: So it was in the early 1970s when the policy really became actively implemented?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: At the negotiations in May of 1973, the United States announced for the first time its plans for Tinian. It was featured in the *Pacific Daily News* and reported that the United States wanted all of the island and they would lease one-third of it to the civilian community. Do you remember having any reactions to that?
- Fitial: No. I never had any reaction to that.
- Willens: Did you follow the negotiations through Felix and others as they went on?

- Fitial: Yes.
- Willens: Were there any specific issues that you and the Carolinian community thought were of special importance? You mentioned, for example, the monetary settlement for the lease of the land on Tinian, and that figure came out to be about \$20 million. You made reference to \$14 million which was in the Covenant for governmental operations, CIP, . . .
- Fitial: Yes. I'm talking about budget.
- Willens: So you were talking primarily about the \$14 million as being . . .
- Fitial: Guaranteed financial . . .
- Willens: As being insufficient.
- Fitial: Much inadequate.
- Willens: Did you play any role in subsequent years in negotiating with the United States for further financial assistance? When you became an elected official of the Commonwealth government, did you play any role in negotiating the second multi-year support?
- Fitial: No, I did not. I was not part of the 902 [negotiations].
- Willens: What was your basis at the time for believing that the level of financial support was understated? Were you concerned principally about government operations, or were you concerned primarily about infrastructure needs?
- Fitial: Both. I really believe at that time that the \$14 million guaranteed financial assistance for government operations was way below the needed amount.
- Willens: The United States defended its proposal, and it started out as a much lower level, as saying that the \$14 million was about twice what the Mariana Islands was getting at the time under the TTPI budget, that the level of support for the Marianas was in the range of \$6 to \$7 million at the time. Do you have any recollection as to whether that is a fair measure of the sufficiency of the \$14 million reflected in the Covenant?
- Fitial: Well, before the commonwealth status came into being, maybe that was true, because the Marianas was generating around \$6 or \$7 million when I was still in the TT [government]. But when the commonwealth status came into being, and especially when we removed the restriction, the foreign investment restriction, the Northern Marianas started collecting revenues in excess of \$14 million per year.
- Willens: You mean collecting revenues from other sources through taxation.
- Fitial: Right. In other words, locally-generated revenues.
- Willens: Yes.
- Fitial: Internal resources.
- Willens: Did you and your colleagues discuss with Felix whether he should ultimately vote in favor of the Covenant or abstain?
- Fitial: Yes. We did. We got together, and the UCA, United Carolinian Association, we all voted to instruct Felix not to sign the Covenant.
- Willens: And what was it specifically about the Covenant that persuaded you and the majority not to support it? Was it the whole concept of separate negotiations, or was it the deficiencies in the Covenant that you perceived at the time?

- Fitial: Deficiencies, like the money issue, for one. We really believed that that was very, very low. And also the fact that we really believed, I guess because of the level of funding, [that it was not the best arrangement].
- Willens: Were there any other specific provisions that you remember that were important in this decision?
- Fitial: In general, the Carolinian Association felt at that time that there was no specific provision in the Covenant that would guarantee protection particularly for the Carolinians.
- Willens: Was there concern within your Association that the Chamorro majority would enact laws and operate in a way that would discriminate against the Carolinian community?
- Fitial: That was a concern.
- Willens: Did you have any experience over the past 10 or 15 years where the Chamorro leadership had in fact discriminated against the Carolinians?
- Fitial: Well, not so much on discrimination, but on representation. Like you said earlier, the District Legislature was dominated by Chamorros, I mean the Popular Party. Most of the Carolinians, the vast majority of the Carolinians, belonged to the opposite party. So we were not so much concerned about discrimination, but representation. We were concerned very much about having representation in the new political status, the new form of government. And as you will recall later on, when we started framing the Constitution, the First Constitutional Convention, I came in with the delegate proposal, to establish the Office of Carolinian Affairs.
- Willens: Was there any dissenting view within the Carolinian Association as to what position to take about the Covenant, or would you say it was the overwhelming majority to reject it?
- Fitial: It was an overwhelming view of the Carolinian Association that the Covenant should not be executed.
- Willens: Did you then play an active role in the plebiscite with respect to the Covenant?
- Fitial: Not personally.
- Willens: But the Carolinian community did?
- Fitial: The Carolinian community did. As you noticed, even when you came for the Constitutional Convention, you still see those "Vote no" signs all over the island.
- Willens: Did you think that the political education campaign that was administered by Commissioner Canham was a fair one?
- Fitial: Well, perhaps to him it was fair, but from the very start, we already conceived that the Covenant was still premature and it should not have been executed. So to us Carolinians who were not in favor of the Covenant at that time, the efforts, the political education efforts by Canham, were an exercise in futility.
- Willens: Did you consider that the period allowed for political education was too short?
- Fitial: Not really, Howard, because like I said, it's already in our minds that the agreement was premature, and we need more time to really discuss the issues and the terms of that agreement.
- Willens: One of the views that was expressed during the negotiations on behalf of the Carolinian community was that the Carolinians seemed particularly concerned about the consequences of becoming U.S. citizens. It was in part because of this concern that the

option of electing for U.S. national status was provided. Do you have any explanation as to why there was this particular reservation about U.S. citizenship within the Carolinian community?

Fitial: Personally, I wasn't really into that issue myself. But as you know, that issue came about because there was fear among the Carolinians residing here in the Commonwealth that if they become U.S. citizens by virtue of the Covenant, they would automatically lose their rights to own property in the Caroline Islands. And I was not really concerned myself, because I don't own any property in the Caroline Islands.

Willens: Was there any particular view that you had about the land alienation provisions of the Covenant? Did you support the idea of restraints?

Fitial: I supported the land alienation provision because I believed that there should be that protection, which I later called, during the First Constitutional Convention, I believe you vividly recall that I termed that protection "protective discrimination".

Willens: That's certainly right. There was considerable concern expressed by many people as to whether ultimately it would be upheld in the courts.

Fitial: Yes.

Willens: One of the provisions of the Covenant that developed at the very last stages was the requirement of a bicameral legislature and protection, so to speak, for the islands of Rota and Tinian. What was your reaction to that aspect of the Covenant?

Fitial: Personally I do not support the bicameral system, because of not only the costs involved—it is more expensive to have a bicameral than a unicameral legislature—but also the feeling among the residents of Rota and Tinian that would create disunity among the people of the Northern Marianas. Before, we were always feeling united, together, but when the bicameral legislature came into being, we now have a very strong feeling of regionalism among the residents of the Northern Marianas.

Willens: Do you think that the complaints that the people of Tinian and Rota had been discriminated against were accurate?

Fitial: I don't think so. I always believed, Howard, that within the framework, they should always try to resolve internal conflicts within the unity. So now the bicameral system provides the opportunity for Rota and Tinian to become disunited. In other words, they have strong feelings of not getting united.

Willens: Based on the years that you served in the Legislature, did you feel that the role and authority of Tinian and Rota in the Senate was an obstacle to effective government?

Fitial: Very much so. And if we did not come up with this bicameral legislature, it would have been better for both Tinian and Rota to get together because we are peaceful people. And I believe that we can compromise easily if we are on an equal term. But now, Rota feels that they have the leverage over Saipan, because they can call the shots in the Senate, which I don't like. I always like to see people work their differences out within a united front, not separate. Right now we see the Senate as three separate subunits. It's not like before when we have a District Legislature. We don't care whether it's Rota, you know, the feeling of sectionalism was not there. In other words, Rota always got their needs just by compromising with the other members of the District Legislature. A good example is the budget issue. They will continue to fight over that issue as long as the system continues of having a bicameral legislature. When I was the Speaker of the Legislature, I tried my very best to get Rota and Tinian members in the House to agree, and we were successful then,

because we had a very good working team in the House. So for example, the first year I convinced the Tinian representative to compromise and give Rota more this year, and then next year Rota compromises, gives Tinian more next year. That's how we managed to pass the budget without any problem.

Willens: That seems to be evidence that you can overcome the institutional problems if you have effective political leadership in the Legislature.

Fitial: That's true. But unfortunately, Howard, as you can tell from the history of the Legislature, we experienced more difficulty creating a good working relationship among the three Senatorial Districts. And even when I was in the Legislature, as Speaker of the House, I would convince the Rota and Tinian members in the House, but when the budget gets to the Senate, it's an entirely different ball game. So I had to resort to extraordinary means. I'll give you a good example. When all the House members agreed on this budget, because the budget always emanates from the House, so we know that the Senate's going to fight over it, and they're going to change it. So what we did, we agreed, all of us, this was an unanimous consensus, that we'll pass the budget the way we wanted it and the way the Governor wanted it, too, so we have two over one. When we sent up to the Senate, we attach a rider, that there was this CDBG, community development block grant, going for Rota, and there was a deadline. So we attached that to the budget. So as soon as we transmitted the budget up to the Senate, we adjourned the House *sine die*, so the budget cannot come back to the House. So that left the Senate with no choice—either no budget or they have to pass our version.

Willens: Was it successful?

Fitial: Yes. It was successful. And some Senators from Rota, they called me all kinds of names, because I managed to get that budget. But that was just one case. Like you said, you've got to have effective leadership, in both houses, to achieve what needs to be done.

Siemer: Let me go back first, if I could, to the actual Constitutional Convention bill. When the Constitutional Convention was being set up, the Legislature passed a bill specifying how many delegates from each island, what kind of election procedures, and so on. Did the United Carolinian Association play a role at that time in trying to get Carolinian representation in the Constitutional Convention?

Fitial: Yes, through the Territorial Party, later the Republican Party.

Siemer: Was there any Carolinian in the Legislature at that time?

Fitial: I believe Luis Limes was a member of the District Legislature at that time, if I'm not mistaken.

Siemer: I'll go back and check.

Fitial: I may be wrong. Maybe he served earlier. But he was one of the elected Carolinians before the constitutional government.

Siemer: Did you work at all on that—on the Constitutional Convention bill or on the Carolinian position with respect to the bill?

Fitial: No. I was not involved in the formal drafting of the bill. The United Carolinian Association, as a group, did not have any input on the drafting of the Constitutional Convention bill.

Siemer: There was a Constitutional Convention bill drafted in 1975, right after the House of Representatives in the United States approved the Covenant. But remember, then there

was a long delay until the [U.S.] Senate approved it. When the bill came up, it did not provide for any specific Carolinian representation, and it had everyone elected at-large. Frank Ada vetoed that bill in December of 1975, and when he wrote his veto message, he said he vetoed it because the Senate hadn't acted on the Covenant yet, and it was a little unseemly to be setting up the Constitutional Convention before the Covenant was even approved. But when we talked to Ada, he said the real reason he vetoed it was because there was no provision for Carolinian representation, and he was afraid that the Carolinian community, which had opposed the Covenant, would be offended by that, and that there needed to be some special representation for the Carolinian community.

Fitial: Well, he must be creating a new chapter in the history of the Northern Marianas because there was no provision in the Constitutional Convention bill specifically for Carolinians, to guarantee Carolinian representation.

Siemer: That's right. There was not.

Fitial: There was not. In fact, everybody, including all the Carolinian candidates, ran at-large, non-partisan.

Siemer: And three of you got elected.

Fitial: And three of us got elected—Pete Igitol, Limes, and myself. But Felix Rabauliman, Abel Olopai also ran with us.

Siemer: The second time the Constitutional Convention bill came up was in the spring of 1976, and by this time, Erwin Canham was here as the Resident Commissioner. The Constitutional Convention bill passed again with all the delegates elected at-large, and this time Canham vetoed it, because he wanted a specific provision for Carolinian representation. And it went back to the Legislature. Canham made quite an eloquent speech, and the Legislature passed the same bill again, and he vetoed it again. And then Larry Guerrero and some others put together a compromise that had all the delegates elected at-large but allowed for the appointment of two Carolinians in case none were elected. There were some people who thought that the Carolinians who ran could be elected at-large and others who worried about it. Oscar Rasa, for example, was very much in favor of District elections, because he thought that that would be better. Do you remember any of that debate back and forth?

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: Did the Carolinians approach Canham at all to urge that he veto those two bills?

Fitial: Probably Felix Rabauliman did, yes.

Siemer: He would be the person to talk to?

Fitial: He would be the best one to talk to with respect to this particular issue. But personally, I always feel that although the Carolinians are the minority race here, there are some prominent Carolinian leaders at that time that could have been elected at-large, by the people.

Siemer: You recall Luis Limes already had been elected at large?

Fitial: Yes. Luis Limes was elected at large and served in the District Legislature. It could be done. In other words, there were Carolinians who could run at-large and still be successful.

Siemer: When the Territorial Party held its nominating committee meeting to select delegates or to listen to people who wanted to run for delegates, were you a part of that group?

- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Do you remember anybody else who was on the nominating committee at that time?
- Fitial: Not now.
- Siemer: How did the process work?
- Fitial: I remember it, because I served as chairman of the nominating committee, but I forget who were the members.
- Siemer: How big a group was it, approximately?
- Fitial: Oh, it was about seven or nine people.
- Siemer: And how did you go about discussing or deciding who should run as a delegate? You had to pick delegates or representatives to run for the Legislature at the same time.
- Fitial: Right. Precisely. So although the candidates, delegates, candidates for the Constitutional Convention were supposed to be non-partisan, the party was campaigning very strongly for these individual candidates running for the Constitutional Convention under the Republican Party. Some of them were against my Carolinian Affairs office.
- Siemer: Very much so.
- Fitial: They were very much adamant. And I said, I will promise you I'll never run for this position, never apply for this position. I'm only doing it because this is what my Carolinian people are asking. I tell one of them because he was suspecting that I was trying to create a position for myself in the Constitution. So I will never run for that office anyway.
- Siemer: There were a number of people who were opposed to that office.
- Fitial: Even my half-Carolinian cousins, the Guerreros.
- Siemer: What about Dr. Palacios? Is he also half-Carolinian?
- Fitial: He's also half-Carolinian.
- Siemer: I'm very sorry that I missed him, and he wasn't alive when I came back. I always enjoyed talking to him.
- Fitial: He's a nationalist. He's not a racist. He would never be a racist because he's both Carolinian and Chamorro.
- Siemer: Well I always thought that Dr. Palacios was sad to some extent because the Micronesians could not stick together, all of them, that he really would rather have had an actual country.
- Fitial: Right, because the Trust Territory government at that time appears to be an ideal country in the making. And I guess he believed that if we all stick together, we will not only have leverage over the U.S. because of our location here, but the economic potential.
- Siemer: But it was very hard even for the Carolinians here in the Marianas to have common goals with the Carolinians elsewhere. It was very difficult.
- Fitial: It was very difficult, but we believed, Dr. Palacios and I and some other Carolinian leaders believed, that this is something that we can work out ourselves within the framework of a unified Micronesian state.
- Siemer: I always thought that Dr. Palacios thought that if there just had been more time and a longer period of time, maybe things would have worked out, but this window of opportunity opened for the Marianas and it was so important to take advantage of it.

- Fitial: That's right. And you know it was all an emotional drag. It was all campaign based on emotions, not really on facts, and real opportunities. It was all emotional. We were not being educated as far as the effects, the responsibilities, as a result of this new political status. The issue was, would you be willing to subject yourself under Micronesian rule. These people from Palau and Truk will be telling us what to do?
- Siemer: Yap was the particular example that people usually used.
- Fitial: See? So, it was not done properly and the right way, I think. The Saipanese especially were placed in a position where they would make the decision not based on facts but emotions. How can I allow myself to be under the Yapese?
- Siemer: That's very important. I mean, the idea of what it is is almost as appealing as the fact, and so it was an idea of what it could be.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: I think that's what finally won Dr. Palacios over, the idea that it was going to be a Commonwealth and that it would have its own structure and it would have its own government.
- Fitial: Right. We believed that we could work out our differences internally within the framework. I really believed so, because like any other government organization, the people will still be fighting for their rights, individual rights and benefits. When the Micronesian unity is formed, I'm sure that what's happening now, each separate entity would be fighting for rights and benefits. How much of the resources will be spent on my own district.
- Siemer: Just like Rota.
- Fitial: Yes. Still. So it's an inherent problem of government where several sections or groups of people are involved.
- Siemer: Go back if you would to the nominating committee for a minute, and tell me, if you can remember, what you were looking for. The Constitutional Convention was a new venture, raising different considerations than the Legislature? Were you looking for a different kind of people?
- Fitial: No, no, not really. We were looking for the same qualifications of people—people who are influential and educated—so the basic qualifications are the same for the Legislature and the Constitutional Convention.
- Siemer: A number of people ran for both, didn't they?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: You didn't have any rule that if you ran for the Constitutional Convention, you couldn't run for the Legislature at the same time?
- Fitial: No, not at that time.
- Siemer: Were there a number of people who were sponsored by the Territorial Party as delegates who were newcomers to politics—who'd never been in politics before?
- Fitial: Yes. The Villagomez brothers.
- Siemer: Jesus and Ramon.
- Fitial: Yes. Although Ramon was a radical ever since he was in school.
- Siemer: Probably that's what happens when you go to Washington, D.C. to school.

- Fitial: I guess so. So that was something that he picked up in the States, in Washington. But they were mentioned to be leaning more toward the Democrats at that time before the Constitutional Convention. But we managed to enlist them on our slate to run for Constitutional Convention delegates.
- Siemer: There were a couple of names [of people who ran for the Con-Con] that I didn't recognize at all. I wondered if these people had been in politics before. How about Thomas Aldan? Had he been in politics before?
- Fitial: No.
- Siemer: How about Silvio Ada?
- Fitial: Silvio Ada was in politics as a candidate, but he never won an office.
- Siemer: How about Jose Rios?
- Fitial: Jose Rios was in politics all his life, but he only became successful in one or two elections.
- Siemer: So he had run before, but had not been elected before.
- Fitial: No.
- Siemer: How about Jesus Pangelinan?
- Fitial: Jesus Pangelinan. No.
- Siemer: Nicholas Santos?
- Fitial: Nick Santos was always a candidate, every election, but unfortunately he always found it very difficult to get in.
- Siemer: How about Jesus Lizama?
- Fitial: Jesus Lizama, he was also a candidate, right?
- Siemer: He was a candidate. He didn't win in the Constitutional Convention.
- Fitial: He didn't win in the Constitutional Convention.
- Siemer: Had he been a candidate before? Had he been elected to anything before?
- Fitial: No, but his family traditionally were strong Republican followers.
- Siemer: And how about Francisco Castro?
- Fitial: Fran Castro ran before in municipal elections and the District Legislature. He also ran in the 1972 election, but he did not make it. He ran, I guess, as a candidate for the Municipal Council and as a candidate for the District Legislature, but he did not get in. He became famous when he was working as an immigration officer, and later became the chief immigration officer.
- Siemer: That's the position Jose Mafnas has now.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: How about Herman T. Palacios?
- Fitial: Herman T?
- Siemer: Had he run before he ran for the Constitutional Convention?
- Fitial: I don't know, because he's a Democrat, but I guess he ran for public office before. He was

- strong politically in his own village, San Antonio. But he's not very well known at that time in the other villages.
- Siemer: Once you all were elected and the Territorial Party had a very large majority, then you had to get the convention organized. How did you decide on the three committees and who was going to be a convention officer and so on?
- Fitial: I believe it was your firm or OTSP, the Office of Transition Studies and Planning.
- Siemer: We worked for OTSP, but we didn't set up the committee structure.
- Fitial: Well, it was already set up when we became elected. All we did was to fill the slots.
- Siemer: How were the committee chairmen picked?
- Fitial: The committee chairmen were picked by the majority.
- Siemer: Territorial leadership?
- Fitial: Yes. The Territorial leadership. So it was decided that the highest vote-getter will be the President and then the chairman of the Party would be the first Vice-president . . .
- Siemer: Was that Dr. Palacios?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: He was the Saipan Vice-president.
- Fitial: Right.
- Siemer: I think that wound up being the third vice-president, because I think Ben Manglona was the first.
- Fitial: Right. Yes.
- Siemer: And then . . .
- Fitial: Tinian.
- Siemer: That was Vicente Manglona.
- Fitial: Second. And Dr. Palacios was the third, right. That was the organization. So he was the Chairman of the Territorial Party at that time, so he automatically became a Vice-president.
- Siemer: Was that also true on Rota and Tinian—that Ben was the head of the Territorial Party on Rota, and Vicente was head of the Territorial Party on Tinian?
- Fitial: Right.
- Siemer: How did you wind up with the assignment for the finance committee?
- Fitial: I guess because I was working for the budget office, and I was respected by our people as someone who is good with figures and government operations in general.
- Siemer: Did you appreciate at the time when you were assigned to that committee what a big problem the local government was going to be?
- Fitial: I know.
- Siemer: Do you remember that debate went on and on and on, and you made all kinds of efforts to negotiate?

- Fitial: I know, the local government [problems] when we were trying to abolish the commissionership and modify the structure, the existing structure, of the municipal form of government. It would become a representation form of government rather than a . . .
- Siemer: Your committee had some of the most radical proposals in front of it.
- Fitial: Right. I found it to be challenging and at the same time amusing.
- Siemer: How did you pick your committee members? How did you decide which delegates should be on your committee?
- Fitial: Well, again, by background. Luis Benevente was the mayor, so he definitely qualified for the job.
- Siemer: I brought you a list of the people. Tell me if you can remember what their background was that gave you the idea that they would fit well on this committee?
- Fitial: Dela Cruz—he was the Vice-chairman of the committee, because he was from Rota. We decided that Vice-chairman also would be from Rota or Tinian. Governmental Institutions—Joe Mafnas was Chairman, and his Vice-chairman . . .
- Siemer: Who was Vice-chairman? Let me take a look and see if I've got that one.
- Fitial: You know, we set up a system, and it was pretty much systematized, the appointment of the Chairman and Vice-chairman.
- Siemer: Prudencio Manglona from Rota.
- Fitial: He was from Rota. And Personal Rights, . . .
- Siemer: That was Dr. Palacios. He was Vice-chairman of that one.
- Fitial: He was Vice-chairman because [Felipe] Atalig [the Chairman] was from Rota.
- Siemer: Is that right? Was Felipe Atalig viewed as being from Rota?
- Fitial: Yes. So that's true. Because Tinian was predominantly how many representatives from Tinian?
- Siemer: Five?
- Fitial: Oh, yes. Five. Let me see, 25 from Saipan, because we were 39 all together. So, 25 from Saipan . . . .
- Siemer: And you had, what, eight from Rota? And five from Tinian? And Daniel Castro from the Northern Islands?
- Fitial: That's right. Eight, five, one.
- Siemer: So you needed to put some Rota and Tinian people on each committee. What was your approach to the Popular Party representation on each committee? How did you work that out?
- Fitial: Actually, we just gave them slots, and we asked them to fill in.
- Siemer: So the Popular Party said, this is who I want to put on the Finance Committee.
- Fitial: Right. And I think Maggie [Camacho], [Juan DLG] Demapan, and [Carlos S. Camacho] the first Governor himself were assigned to my committee. Right. I remember Maggie and Demapan, and Carlos Camacho.
- Siemer: Some of the other members of your committee said that Dr. Camacho rarely was there.

- Fitial: He rarely came to the meetings. Actually, it was only Maggie. Maggie was the most active one among the [Popular Party delegates].
- Siemer: She was the only woman, wasn't she?
- Fitial: Maggie was the only woman, that's true. As for the selection to the committee ....
- Siemer: [Luis] Benevente was the Mayor of Saipan, so he had a lot of interest. How about Pete Ogo?
- Fitial: Pete Ogo was the director of education in Rota, so since our committee also deals with education—our committee was not only finance, it was also taxation and education.
- Siemer: How about Steven King?
- Fitial: Steven King was also in finance.
- Siemer: And how about John Tenorio?
- Fitial: John Tenorio was in ADP, systems, he was a data processing guy, but he's good with figures also.
- Siemer: He got to be very involved in the local government structure. He got to be very intellectually involved and very insistent that some methods were right, and even now he remembers that with great enthusiasm.
- Fitial: Oh, yes. He's the expert on local government.
- Siemer: How about Oscar [Rasa]? Why did Oscar want to be on this committee?
- Fitial: Oscar was a floor leader of the Convention. He became a member of this committee—I don't know.
- Siemer: And how about Vicente Manglona? Was he Mayor at that time?
- Fitial: No. He's also running the finance [office] in Tinian. And Jesus Villagomez was an internal auditor for the Trust Territory government.
- Siemer: Had you worked closely with any of those people before?
- Fitial: Yes. Villagomez. When I was in Budget, he was in Internal Audit for the Trust Territory government. And Juan DLG Demapan, he came later and worked in the Budget Office as a budget analyst. So he was a colleague of mine in the Budget Office. And Pete Dela Cruz, he worked shortly for the Economic Development [Office] of the Trust Territory Department of Natural Resources before he went to the Commonwealth to become the economic development officer.
- Siemer: So that was a fairly good group of people who had a good grasp of figures and economics.
- Fitial: Oh, yes. I am proud to say that the composition of this committee consisted of people who were better off intellectually than the other committees.
- Siemer: And the committee worked well together.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: You were able to get your things through the floor fairly well, and you had some fairly fiery speakers, like John Tenorio, who would get out there and advocate the committee's causes.

- Fitial: Yes. John and Pete Dela Cruz also. I remember Pete one time got angry at Pete Atalig, and he refused to cast his vote. He is not voting.
- Siemer: Well, for a while there was a rash of abstaining from voting because people were upset with one thing or another, but then we gradually ....
- Fitial: Oh, yes. I got up at one of the sessions, this was on local government, I remember the Mayor's "may", we changed the "shall" to "may". I'll never forget that. It was just like—you people have a term for it—you have to change to "may" from "shall".
- Siemer: It was enough trying to keep track of Felipe, who was always wandering off to some other idea. Felipe Atalig, I guess, must have been a very good politician. He was very sensitive to all kinds of interests, but he would raise points that were far afield. Then it would take a long time to get everyone back to the subject matter.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Wasn't he a Democrat?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: And then in the Nominating Committee you let him switch over and become a Republican?
- Fitial: Yes, he came from the Democrats.
- Siemer: Was he a good vote-getter?
- Fitial: At that time, because he really catered his public, helped his program to the local community.
- Siemer: Yes. He was always introducing somebody in the gallery or recognizing someone or putting someone's name in the record, just like our Congressmen at home. They fill up the Congressional Record with those things.
- Fitial: Those things are only seasonal. They don't last long. They come and go. Now we don't do that, because when you get up to introduce people like that, people think that you are crazy.
- Siemer: But on the Nominating Committee, you thought it was a good idea to have people who were good vote-getters, even if they came from the Democratic Party?
- Fitial: Yes. Like Ray Villagomez, Jess Villagomez. We recruited these people from the Popular Party.
- Siemer: Because you in the Territorial Party were doing well at that point. You had done very well in the Saipan municipal elections that year, and that was really your first significant victory.
- Fitial: That was the first time. That was the turn of the political climate in the Northern Marianas, Saipan especially.
- Siemer: How had that happened? What was the issue that turned the Territorial Party into such a powerful political party?
- Fitial: I was the chairman of the Nominating Committee. I started this thing, I said, you know, the Popular Party, they don't care who they put up. They always win. So I started recruiting candidates from the Popular Party. So I recruited Roman Palacios, who doesn't know anything about politics, but he has a very big family. So we enlisted him to run for the Municipal Council. And it worked. This guy never said anything. So the old people at

that time, they really liked to feel sorry, concerned, over candidates, political candidates, who found it very difficult to express themselves. So, we have several candidates whom I recruited from the Popular Party to run under the Territorial Party label who were like that. Very soft, timid, and with big families. San Roque, this is predominately a Popular Party stronghold. So before we ran in that Municipal election, we always managed to get [for our] highest candidate, like 35 votes vs. 200 at that time, 200 some votes, it was always over 200 votes difference in San Roque. But in that election, Roman Palacios turned things around because his family came from San Roque. Ninety percent of the people of San Roque are related to Roman. So he really turned that thing around. He came in with 189 votes. He was the top vote-getter in San Roque. And he helped the other candidates.

Siemer: It's that year, that 1975 election for the 1976 Municipal Council, the Territorial Party started to do very well.

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: And then the Constitutional Convention election, you ....

Fitial: Oh, we wiped them out.

Siemer: How did you get to be head of the Nominating Committee? You hadn't run for office yet, had you?

Fitial: No, but you know,...

Siemer: How old were you at the time?

Fitial: I was still underage when the two-party system came into being. I was very active in the Young Territorials. And we were supporting the candidates, and we always lost, every election, we always lose, but the spirit was still there, always there. You won't believe this, I was elected to be the chairman of the Nominating Committee by members including Joeten, Manny Villagomez, Olympia Borja, all very old party members.

Siemer: That's why I wondered how you did that?

Fitial: The founding fathers of the Republican Party. They were my members.

Siemer: How old were you at the time?

Fitial: Oh, gee, I think I was only 18 or 19. But I was very vocal, see. And I guess my upbringing really helped also, my becoming accepted by the political leaders. They always see my name in the Cathedral, on the honor roll. I went to Mt. Carmel High School in the ninth grade, and my name stayed there until I graduated from the 12th grade.

Siemer: Really?

Fitial: Yes. I was number one in my class. And at that time, everybody went to Mt. Carmel Church. So after Mass, they always look at the names on the wall of the Church as you go out.

Siemer: It was your first political advertising.

Fitial: So I became active in politics, always active in elections, campaigning.

Siemer: So you were fortunate in a way, because the Territorial Party turned around quite quickly and became a real force.

Fitial: That's true. And we continued the strategy of recruiting influential people from the other party, influential meaning they have big families, like Pete A. Tenorio. His family even up

to now—all Democrats. But Pete A. Tenorio was never a Democrat, because when he first entered politics it was because of me. I recruited him, and he's much older than me, but I recruited him to run in the Republican Party.

Siemer: Very successfully.

Fitial: Yes. And, see, we even turn around, and we got Eddie Pangelinan back.

Siemer: Well, it makes politics hard to follow for an outsider here because people do switch back and forth.

Fitial: Change, yes.

Siemer: You think you understand what someone's political philosophy is, and then they turn up on the other side.

Fitial: So now, basically the difference between the Democrats and the Republicans, is really just personalities.

Siemer: Not economics so much.

Fitial: No, not economics. It's personalities. The Republicans are very accommodating, because that's how we grew, by enlisting people from the other parties, so we have to accommodate them. So this is the principle that makes the Republican Party successful.

Siemer: But some of the Carolinians went over to the Democratic Party at some point, didn't they? At the time of the Constitutional Convention, almost all of the Carolinians were in the Territorial Party?

Fitial: That's right. But later on ....

Siemer: When did some of them go over?

Fitial: After the first Legislature.

Siemer: In 1980?

Fitial: In 1980.

Siemer: What caused that?

Fitial: It's Oscar Rasa. Oscar Rasa, I guess, was seeing that the faction of Dr. Kaipat, Luis Limes and Felicidad Ogomoro were trying to get him out of the political arena.

Siemer: Really?

Fitial: Yes. So he caused a split because he really supported the UCA, Rabauliman and all the others, and then he tried to downplay Kaipat, the nemesis. So that was the cause of the Carolinian split. But the split was only because of Rasa. That's why Dr. Kaipat went, took his family, his clan, and they supported the Democrats. But, it was never intended for them to be part of the Democrats, to become members of the Democrat [Party]. Because Carolinians are very difficult to do that.

Siemer: Because if you ran, they'd vote for you anyway.

Fitial: So when I ran in the Legislature, I was always the top vote-getter, because I was getting support from both sides. So Rasa slipped out of the political [arena].

Siemer: Oscar was a good vote-getter at the time, too, wasn't he?

Fitial: Yes, he was a good vote-getter of the Carolinians. He only became what he was, at that time, because of the Carolinian support.

- Siemer: Will he come back after he gets out of prison?
- Fitial: No. When that happened, that's the time that I declared and I ran. I always came out number one. His charisma just faded away. I managed to be always number one during my election at the time because I tried to maintain my working relationship with the Carolinians, both factions.
- Siemer: How big is the Carolinian population now?
- Fitial: Now it's close to 10,000.
- Siemer: And how big is the Chamorro population?
- Fitial: Almost 20,000.
- Siemer: So the Carolinians are about one-third?
- Fitial: Yes. Two to one. Right?
- Siemer: Yes.
- Fitial: Two to one.
- Siemer: After you put together your committees and you put together the Convention officers, some of the Popular Party, particularly Dr. Camacho, began to complain that you had not given them any officers, you hadn't given them any committee chairmanships, you hadn't given them anything, and that that wasn't appropriate. And there were several speeches, John DLG. Demapan made a speech, and there seemed to be some friction at the beginning of the Convention, but then the perception was that it sort of died away. Was that fair?
- Fitial: Yes. We considered that to be only political rhetoric. So it was not to be reckoned with in any degree of seriousness.
- Siemer: I brought along some of the delegate proposals that you made, and I wanted to ask you about some of them.
- Fitial: You should bring along the speeches, the extemporaneous speeches that I made.
- Siemer: I brought along your speeches, too. I was going to ask you about those, as well. Take a look at number 29. It should be in that front section there, up there in the upper right-hand corner. That's a proposal for primary elections, and that one you made with Rota and Tinian delegations. Why did you think that was important?
- Fitial: Oh. The primary? Yes, because sometimes there are more people aspiring for the same position, especially nowadays.
- Siemer: But that would mean your Nominating Committee would be out of business because you would select through primary elections, right?
- Fitial: That's true. Well, there's pros and cons. But personally, I support the process of primary elections.
- Siemer: That had not been the case before. It had all been selection in the Party, right?
- Fitial: We call that Convention.
- Siemer: Why were the Rota and Tinian people particularly concerned about that? They had such a small group. You would think that a primary election wouldn't make much difference to them.

Fitial: But they became aware that the issue of representation is very critical to them, because they only have to elect one member of the House.

Siemer: Yes. I remember that.

Fitial: So I guess through this arrangement ....

Siemer: Ben Manglona caused Howard Willens stomach ulcers over walking out of the Convention over that issue.

Fitial: That's right.

Siemer: Take a look at number 37.

Fitial: This was land alienation.

Siemer: It was, and it had to do with corporations in particular. There again, you were working with the Rota people. In sponsoring delegate proposals, if someone from Rota came to you, were you particularly sensitive that you had to keep the Rota people together in order to get the Convention to do its work?

Fitial: Of course. And I can tell if a particular delegate proposal would place Saipan or the Carolinians in a disadvantageous position or not. So I'm also very mindful and critical of that myself. But I supported this concept from the very beginning. That's one of the provisions of the Covenant.

Siemer: It is, and while the Covenant is very general in its provision, but that provision wound up in the Constitution.

Fitial: Right.

Siemer: Take a look at then number 46 on submerged lands.

Fitial: Yes. I think this now becomes current.

Siemer: It's back as an issue again.

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: At the time, back in 1976, was that a practical concern of yours, or were you just trying to look ahead to things that might turn up in the future?

Fitial: I would confess to you, this was a concern, but not as serious, a real concern of mine. Luis was a member of your committee, and he was looking at it more closely than me or Pete Igitol, covering the G.I. (Governmental Institutions Committee).

Siemer: Yes. He was always very concerned about that issue. He still is.

Fitial: He still is. As a matter of fact, like you said, this issue is now back on the discussion table.

Siemer: How about number 90? Cumulative voting.

Fitial: This was a system that Pete Tenorio and I discussed.

Siemer: For a minority, like the Carolinians, who can stick together, if you've got ten people on the slate, and you've only got three of yours, and everyone votes for only three, cumulative voting works extraordinarily well. But your colleagues at the Convention must have understood that in a minute, didn't they?

Fitial: They caught it. So they didn't even give this a chance to breathe in the committee. They

saw it right away. It was self-serving according to them, so I say, well let's not do it. But this was a system that was supposed to cater to the Carolinian aspirants for political offices.

Siemer: Well, it's interesting. I wonder if your Chamorro colleagues understood how powerful it would have made the Carolinian minority.

Fitial: They did. Because Carolinians are known for block voting. In fact, somebody said why put cumulative voting, just put block voting, because everybody understands what block voting is.

Siemer: Take a look at number 118. Why did you want that in the Constitution?

Fitial: Actually, because I was looking at the opportunity for young people to get not only interested but also involved in the political process.

Siemer: And was this Youth Congress something that you already had in place, or was it something that you were going to create?

Fitial: We were going to create [it]. We never had anything [like this] in the District Legislature at that time. This was something that I would really like to see, for the young people to get involved, because I was just looking at my own experience. I started out very, very young in politics. Jess Mafnas, Joe's older brother, he and I started out together, and he's much older than me. But he was not even eligible to be active in the party with the older members of the party. He started out also with the Young Territorials.

Siemer: Was Jess active with you in trying to recruit candidates and put together a good slate?

Fitial: Yes, the two of us. The real party strategists, it's Jess and myself. We really worked very, very hard to make the Republican Party strong. That's why he feels responsible for the Party. Me too. I'm doing a lot of things, sacrificing myself, for the Party because I really like the Party. The Republican Party looked at the Carolinian community as people, and they made them feel that they are part of the system.

Siemer: Well, Larry [Guerrero] certainly did that.

Fitial: Yes. That's true. I had a problem with some members of the Republican Party, and they decided to move over into the other Party. We knew that they would come back. And like this very last election, a big group of Carolinians went over to support Froilan [Tenorio]. Right after the election, they came to me, a lot of them came back to me, and said, because I am the chairman of the Party, they want to come back, because they feel awkward. Sure, they would feel awkward, because they're staying in somebody else's house.

Siemer: Were there any Carolinians on Froilan's transition team?

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: I didn't see any. Who was it?

Fitial: Tommy Tebutep.

Siemer: I guess I didn't recognize the name.

Fitial: Tommy Tebutep, his father was a very strong Carolinian leader. In fact, he participated in translating the Constitution.

Siemer: Into Carolinian?

Fitial: Into Carolinian. And he helped me [translate].

Siemer: We had some urgency in getting that done quickly.

- Fitial: I ended up doing that.
- Siemer: Did you do the Covenant as well?
- Fitial: No, only the Constitution. I did the Constitution, with the help of Tommy's father.
- Siemer: Because we were very concerned about getting that done quickly.
- Fitial: I did the Carolinian. And Villagomez, Jess Villagomez and the priest, his brother, Father Villagomez, did the Chamorro.
- Siemer: Tomas Villagomez?
- Fitial: No. It was Father Jose Villagomez. And Jesus [Villagomez].
- Siemer: Look at 119 and 120; 119 is financial disclosure, and 120 is....
- Fitial: We always come up with the same justifications for rejecting these delegate proposals. Like many other delegate proposals, this was rejected because it is not within the Constitutional purview.
- Siemer: Oh, you mean it didn't rise to the level of a Constitutional provision?
- Fitial: Yes. Right. In other words, it was decided to leave it up to the Legislature, because ...
- Siemer: What happened with the Legislature? I remember that discussion. I remember you arguing that the Legislature would never do it.
- Fitial: Right. But anyway, it's done. We now have a requirement for public elected officials, all candidates for public offices, to disclose their financial matters.
- Siemer: To whom did they disclose it?
- Fitial: To the Board of Elections.
- Siemer: And then those are open files?
- Fitial: They publish it.
- Siemer: Really?
- Fitial: In the newspaper.
- Siemer: Is that a disincentive for people to run for office?
- Fitial: Some.
- Siemer: It's often argued in the United States that it's a disincentive.
- Fitial: It is.
- Siemer: But here, I would think everyone would know everyone else. In the United States, people argue no one's going to go and look at those, and who cares anyway?
- Fitial: Well, here, you don't have to go.
- Siemer: It comes to you.
- Fitial: It comes to you. Yes, in the form of the news. So I was glad that this particular issue became a reality, later on in the Legislature.
- Siemer: And 120 also became a reality. That's the disclosure of the budget.
- Fitial: Right.
- Siemer: Look at 121.

- Fitial: Yes. This is a traditional title that is given to any mayor.
- Siemer: Was this a part of the debate about the mayor's title and powers?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Some people wanted to call him a Lt. Governor, some people wanted to call him a mayor.
- Fitial: This is part of it, yes. I was the one against giving them the title of Lt. Governor, Rota Lt. Governor, Tinian, because I was against the idea of breaking up the central government, decentralization of the central government.
- Siemer: Almost all your Saipan delegates were against that, were they not?
- Fitial: Right.
- Siemer: That was pretty much an island dispute.
- Fitial: Right. I don't whether you recall the debate between Manglona, Benjamin, and myself when he kept arguing that they are a minority.
- Siemer: I brought that with me. That's a very eloquent speech of yours in which you point out that you are a bigger minority.
- Fitial: I said, you are wrong, my friend. You're looking at the minority. You know, he and I had a good time, not only during the Constitutional Convention, but also when we became members of the Legislature. I don't know whether I told Howard about this. Rota always causes problems with the budget; they always change whatever the House puts together and transmits up to the Senate. So one time we all agreed—Rota representative, Tinian representative, and Saipan representatives and the House—that this is going to be the budget for the CNMI government for that particular fiscal year. Fiscal 1983, I guess. So we attached a rider, CDBG, community development block grant, for Rota, and it had a deadline. So, we passed that and transmitted it up to the Senate, and then we adjourned the House *sine die*. So no more session. Manglona really got mad. Because we knew already what he wanted to change in that particular budget.
- Siemer: Ben has been a very effective political advocate for Rota over the years.
- Fitial: Very effective.
- Siemer: He's been very consistent and very ....
- Fitial: It is because of Benjamin that Rota is what it is now, what it is today. Nobody could have done it, if not Benjamin. Any Saipanese who goes down to Rota would tell you the same thing. It's more than what they deserve.
- Siemer: How much....
- Fitial: For less than 2,000 people, they have a better road system, better lighting system, better infrastructure. Now they have a better power system, too.
- Siemer: How much did you know about what Ben's position was going to be on the powers that he wanted for Rota before you actually sat down in the convention? In meetings within the Territorial Party, did he have sort of a program or a list of things?
- Fitial: No. All that came out later during the Constitutional Convention. Before the Constitutional Convention there was a hidden agenda of Manglona. But I know him, and I knew him since before because we were always having meetings as a Party, and I

covered the Legislature when I was working for the radio station as a news director when he was a member of the District Legislature. And he was always himself.

Siemer: So it wasn't any surprise to you.

Fitial: No.

Siemer: Remember along about the fifth day in the convention, Ben Manglona came out. There was a position paper that they wrote, and Ben got up and made a speech and basically said, I want a separate government. I want a separate government on Tinian, a separate government on Rota, and this is just a confederation deal.

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: And at that point, a number of your colleagues seemed to react as though that was the first time that they understood what Ben was after and what his vision was.

Fitial: No. We knew that. In fact, when he issued his proclamation, confederation proclamation, the reaction that most of the Saipanese Republican Party, and including Democrats, felt at that time was—you can have your confederation provided you pay for it.

Siemer: Well, in your committee there was some discussion of that.

Fitial: Right. If Rota wants all these goodies, then let them pay for it. Let them generate the necessary funding to provide for all of those goodies. That was the leverage that the Saipan constituency representatives in the Con-Con had over the other two island representatives. The means. That was always a point of compromise, a compromising point to our favor. Because we know that Rota wants many, many things, but we also know that they cannot afford all they want.

Siemer: So your recollection is it wasn't much of a surprise when Ben got up in the Convention and outlined the whole program of things that he wanted.

Fitial: Not a surprise that he came up. Because he would be coming to us again for help, for financial assistance.

Siemer: And then remember that went on for a few days, when Larry Guerrero got up and made a sort of a "Let's be unified" speech, and then a couple of days later, David Maratita got up and said: "Let us do away with local government." Did you know that that one was coming?

Fitial: Yes. Because David Maratita had already renounced his Rota loyalty.

Siemer: But he is from Rota, isn't he?

Fitial: He's from Rota, but he was elected here in [Saipan]. He was a delegate ....

Siemer: From Saipan.

Fitial: From Saipan. See? Because he was married and raising a family here on Saipan. So he still has feelings for Rota, but not as much as he has feelings for Saipan then.

Siemer: Was it that, or did he think that the Rota program was impractical?

Fitial: He also understood the responsibilities and the requirements that go with the desire to have a strong decentralized government in Rota and Tinian.

Siemer: Then after that, this is the journal, Senator Borja got up and made a long speech. And then you made your very effective speech about the Carolinian minority.

- Fitial: Oh, yes. This is just to offset the argument that Benjamin Manglona put forth as far as protection for the minority.
- Siemer: Were you trying to persuade the Rota delegates that his protection argument should not be credited fully? Your Saipan delegates didn't need to be persuaded on that point, did they?
- Fitial: No.
- Siemer: When you made that speech, you were speaking to the Rota ....
- Fitial: To Benjamin Manglona and the Rotanese. I was trying to get my message across that you are more fortunate than I, because you are Chamorro and you are a majority. I am a minority; I am a Carolinian. So we should be given more protection. Because like I said, we cannot trust the new government. So where's the protection for the minority?
- Siemer: Then it's right after this that your committee takes up local government. Had you decided specifically to do other subjects first because you thought that one was going to be a difficult one?
- Fitial: You could sense it already from the very start, following the proclamation by Benjamin, and then some of the delegate proposals making the decentralization issue stronger.
- Siemer: Did you think it would be better to tackle it last because your committee members would be better at this?
- Fitial: That was our strategy.
- Siemer: Another time that your committee ran into Ben Manglona's opposition was when you put up your constitutional amendment provision. That was the first one that your committee took up, and the Rota delegation objected to the way that you had proposed constitutional amendments be approved.
- Fitial: By ratification.
- Siemer: Right. There was sort of an interesting way that you dealt with that. There were Rota amendments in the Committee of the Whole, and you let that go, and then you took it back to the committee. Why did you do it that way?
- Fitial: Because they were not fully prepared to argue the issue. So I just let it go in the Committee of the Whole. I remember that.
- Siemer: You let it go, and then you took it back to the committee, and then you brought forth another report.
- Fitial: A different one.
- Siemer: And then Larry Guerrero was afraid to let you do that, do you remember? He didn't want to let you bring an amended report back? He thought it ought to be on the second reading, and he was afraid that you were introducing some new procedural way that everyone would complicate things. And so there was an exchange between you and Larry on the floor.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: And again, you....
- Fitial: That was on the procedure because I guess he was telling me, he was trying to explain to me that we lacked the procedures for bringing in amendments. Am I correct? And I don't care. I keep telling him, I don't care whether you have the procedures or not. Here, I have

an amendment ready. So I want to submit my amendment, and then you bring in your procedures. If you don't have any now, bring them in later. He kept trying to explain to me that we need the procedures to be installed first before any amendment be submitted. Then he asked me, is that clear? I said, "Clear as mud."

Siemer: That's exactly what you said. But you persisted again, and you got him to agree to let the committee bring that back to the floor. Then the second time around, you got [Benjamin] Manglona aroused.

Fitial: Yes. He was concerned about the Rota position again. All the time, he was playing balance, balance, balance. He was trying to balance things out during the Constitutional Convention. I admired him for doing that. But I was also strategizing—making sure that we don't get off balance. I was seeing it from the other side, from another angle. So he was all on top, surface. But I was already seeing the maneuvering from different angles, that the Rotanese here want a different form of local government.

Siemer: Manglona came at this every way that he could. He came at it in constitutional amendment, he came at it in initiative, he came at it in local government. He came at it every way he could. Do you think that that strategy caused him to get farther than he would have otherwise, or did it turn the Saipanese delegates against him?

Fitial: Yes. It became very obvious that he doesn't care about unity. He was only trying to get the best, and forget the rest, for Rota.

Siemer: There were a lot of speeches about unity.

Fitial: Those were all fake, political rhetoric.

Siemer: You seemed to be successful in your committee, though, in keeping the two Rota people in your committee very much a part of your majority. They would sign the report, they would support you, and then it would get to the floor, and you would have more difficulty.

Fitial: Yes. Pete Dela Cruz believed in Ben Fitial, because I always make him feel important, too. He was my Vice-chairman. So at times I would call on him to preside over the committee meetings, especially when it is obvious that a Rota issue would come up. So by placing him, by having him preside over the meeting, it reduces his ability to argue more.

Siemer: And he was not one of the people who walked out, was he?

Fitial: No.

Siemer: How did you and Jose Mafnas decide how to deal with the local government problem? Part of it was in the executive branch article, and part of it was in your local government article.

Fitial: Yes.

Siemer: How did the two of you decide how to deal with that among your two committees?

Fitial: We met jointly, and we decided.

Siemer: There weren't many issues that came before your committee that you had any difficulty getting through the Convention, were there? Local government and constitutional amendment were the only ones that you had any really difficult time getting through the Convention once the committee decided.

Fitial: That's all.

Siemer: Taxation, public debt.

- Fitial: Taxation, public debt, education.
- Siemer: Corporations?
- Fitial: Corporations. We also took up education, mandatory education. But that's why we reserved it to the very end, the local government issue, because from looking at the different delegate proposals that were coming in, it was obvious already that that particular issue was going to be real controversial. Luis Benevente, interestingly, participated in all the discussions, he supported in principle, but he voted against it because he said it would be crazy for him to vote for something that would drive him out of his job. Because he was the incumbent mayor of Saipan at the time.
- Siemer: But he didn't campaign against it on the floor, did he?
- Fitial: No. He supported it in principle, but he just explained his position that here is one occasion where I just have to vote against something I like because of my present position. He was the mayor, and he's driving himself out of that job.
- Siemer: I want to show you one other piece of this one.
- Fitial: Do you have copies of these?
- Siemer: Sure, would you like them? Would you like us to make you some copies?
- Fitial: Yes. This is something that I would like to have. We never compiled these things together. And you know that typhoon really hurt.
- Siemer: A lot of people said they lost all their papers.
- Fitial: We lost all because of the typhoon. You know that typhoon flattened my house. I lost all my degrees and my academic awards.
- Siemer: Down toward the bottom of the page. This is toward the end of the first half of the Convention. You finally passed in principle all of the constitutional provisions. You're about to go to public hearing. And you get up now and say, I want you to know that I'm going to come up with some proposals with respect to the Carolinian minority.
- Fitial: Yes. Right.
- Siemer: Up to that time, other than the cumulative voting proposal, which wasn't specifically Carolinian but which would have been of benefit, you hadn't made any Carolinian proposals at all.
- Fitial: No. But we already had it. In other words, I've been meeting with the Carolinian Association, and they came up with the proposals. I was only the vehicle, I mean the three of us. We only served as vehicles, but also proposals originated or came from the UCA, United Carolinian Association.
- Siemer: Because now, right after this speech, in a few days after that—I'll show you some of that—you came in with a number of proposals, all of which were directed at specific Carolinian objectives.
- Fitial: You don't have them here.
- Siemer: I have them here. It was after the public hearings. One of the things I wanted to ask you about was the Carolinian participation in the public hearings here on Saipan. Did the United Carolinian Association try to get a position together for the public hearings?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Who was the spokesperson then?

- Fitial: Rabauliman was the chief spokesperson for the Association.
- Siemer: There is a letter that came in from Mrs. Ogumoro.
- Fitial: Yes. Felicidad.
- Siemer: And that's a fairly general approach. She's saying we really need to have something here, and it's important. But then the United Carolinian Association wanted one of the senators, they wanted ten of the representatives.
- Fitial: Right.
- Siemer: That had not been your approach all along.
- Fitial: No.
- Siemer: Who among the Carolinians was thinking that this was a better way, to set aside specific seats and things for Carolinians?
- Fitial: The Association. Rabauliman, Olopai. Because at that time, the Carolinians were united. Ogumoro. There were certain Carolinian individuals who were recognized as representatives of their clans. So they met. All these people met, and I was also in the meetings. And this is what they wanted. They said, let's ask for more because almost always when they give, they always give less.
- Siemer: That's what I was going to ask you: if the strategy was to ask for more.
- Fitial: Yes. The strategy was the sky is the limit. Because they expect that they will not get the sky, but at least . . .
- Siemer: Behind those tabs, these are the delegate proposals, I think. Take a look first at number 17.
- Fitial: Yes. Right. They will include a Carolinian in the Council.
- Siemer: Now take a look at number 55.
- Fitial: This is the Equal Opportunity Commission, right?
- Siemer: Then take a look at number 63. There are a whole series of these I wanted you to take a look at to recall.
- Fitial: Oh, yes. This is the one. This is the commission also.
- Siemer: Well, I didn't quite understand this one. How was this one going to work?
- Fitial: To establish a commission which, again, like the [number] 55. Very closely related.
- Siemer: Ah, I see.
- Fitial: Yes. Very closely related. The equal opportunity commission—two Carolinians shall be appointed.
- Siemer: Then take a look at number 70. There's another one.
- Fitial: Yes. This is the same one. It is the same one.
- Siemer: Why did you do the same one three times?
- Fitial: Except this one is "at least one member." Yes.
- Siemer: So was the Carolinian Association reformulating its position, or did you just get different suggestions from different people?
- Fitial: Different suggestions, because I know this one is from the UCA.

- Siemer: That's the first one—number 55?
- Fitial: 5, 63. But this one [number 70] is, I know, because this one is by myself. Interesting. At least one member shall be a woman. It is an equal protection provision.
- Siemer: Now take a look at number 74.
- Fitial: rticle 2, that's the legislature. Right. This is [one from the] UCA. Some of the Carolinians want to run for elective office, but they knew they don't have any chance. In other words, they have run already in the past . . .
- Siemer: And lost.
- Fitial: And lost. So . . .
- Siemer: But if they ran just for a Carolinian post, then they would have a chance?
- Fitial: Oh, yes.
- Siemer: And then the next one is number 75.
- Fitial: Yes, that's the executive assistant. That's the one . . .
- Siemer: That's the one you seem to sponsor the most. You made a speech about it.
- Fitial: Yes. Because this would be more readily acceptable by the Convention. I spoke to the leadership of the Convention, and they seemed to be receptive to this particular proposal more than the others. Because the others, although they may have merit, I feel like they are self-serving to a great extent, like the special representative. That came from Olopai. Olopai always ran and he lost. So he was really pushing me to submit that particular proposal.
- Siemer: How was the United Carolinian Association feeling at this point with all of their proposals on the table? Were they focused on one, or did people really expect that all of them would pass or all of them would be accepted?
- Fitial: No. They were not expecting all of them to be passed. Like I said, the strategy was, let's submit all of them, and expect that at least one or two will be accepted.
- Siemer: What was their view after the Executive Assistant was accepted?
- Fitial: They felt that they accomplished something; it was a feeling of accomplishment by most of them.
- Siemer: And there wasn't any backlash from the fact that a number of other proposals had been rejected?
- Fitial: No. Because we had a meeting after that, and I explained to them that if some of us can make it, why jeopardize our chances? Rabauliman was not really pushing for it, but his wife was also very influential.
- Siemer: What was Dr. Kaipat's position at this point?
- Fitial: Dr. Kaipat's position? He's like me. If he ran, he will win. Because Dr. Kaipat was the strongest Carolinian at that time politically. If Dr. Kaipat declared his candidacy to run for an elective office, he would win.
- Siemer: So he wouldn't be worried about setting aside specific seats?
- Fitial: No. But he was supportive of this Executive Assistant for Carolinian Affairs.
- Siemer: How do you think that worked out in practice?

- Fitial: It didn't work out the way that the authors had expected.
- Siemer: Who's held that position?
- Fitial: It was first held by Pedro Guerrero, one of the Guerrero brothers, senators in the District Legislature at that time, who argued against it. They wrote a letter to the Convention criticizing and opposing it.
- Siemer: Herman R. did. Herman R. Guerrero did.
- Fitial: Yes. So his younger brother, who later on became the Speaker of the House, Pedro Guerrero, he was the first Executive Assistant for Carolinian Affairs. It was very ironic.
- Siemer: And when you say it didn't work out the way the originators had intended, what do you mean?
- Fitial: In other words, the services that that office was intended to provide to the Carolinian community never were delivered. Those services were never delivered.
- Siemer: Was it because of the person in the office?
- Fitial: It was a combination between the person in the office and the Governor. Because ultimately the Governor makes the decisions. So even though the person in the office is aggressive, if the Governor turns off his ears, that office would not provide those services.
- Siemer: Who succeeded Pedro Guerrero?
- Fitial: Felix Rabauliman, when Pete P. Tenorio became Governor.
- Siemer: And how long did Felix serve?
- Fitial: Eight years—the whole term of Pete P. Tenorio.
- Siemer: And then who succeeded Felix?
- Fitial: This guy, a Trukese, the controversial Trukese.
- Siemer: Who is it?
- Fitial: Rokucho Billy.
- Siemer: How do you spell it?
- Fitial: R-o-k-u-c-h-o. That's his first name. His last name is Billy, like Bronco Billy. Anthony House.
- Siemer: And he came in with ....
- Fitial: He came in under the Guerrero Administration. So he's there for four years now. He just wrote me a note. He says: "Ben, we would like to include you in the directory of Carolinian leaders. Please send one wallet-sized photo and a copy of your resume."
- Siemer: When you went to the second half of the Convention after the public hearings, the leadership put out an agenda and grouped some of the issues.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: You scheduled the legislative branch [article] right up front, at the very front. Why did you do that? You just had a terrible fight about that in the first half, and now you put it right back before the Convention again in the second half.
- Fitial: I guess I was not really pushing for that. It was Mafnas and Rasa. I guess everybody who had an interest in their minds on the legislative branch, they wanted that article.

- Siemer: Article 2.
- Fitial: Yes. Article 2. To be first.
- Siemer: Did they think that it was tactically wise to put it first because it was going to take a long time? And indeed, it did.
- Fitial: It did, certainly, a long, long time.
- Siemer: You were on that special committee, weren't you?
- Fitial: Yes. I was on that special committee together with Dr. Carlos Camacho, and we kept arguing about districting because he said, make sure that the Republicans do not take up all the votes.
- Siemer: That was the very last issue that got resolved.
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Tell me what you recall about the events leading up to Ben Manglona walking out of the Convention with some of his colleagues from Rota. Did you know that was coming?
- Fitial: I knew, and it was a variety of issues. They were not satisfied with the design of the local government, the powers of the Governor. They wanted those powers to be delegated by Constitution, not by law. They wanted those powers to be delegated to the head of each of these municipalities. And another issue was the representation. They don't care where the money comes from, as long as they have more than Tinian. It was not so much against Saipan having more than Rota. They cannot stomach having the same number of representatives as Tinian.
- Siemer: Well, I wanted to ask you how that possibly came to be an issue over which someone would be walking out, because the Saipan majority could outvote one representative in the House of Representatives or two or three or any practical number that the Rota delegation could hope to get. And yet they walked out over having only one representative as opposed to having two. It was primarily because of their having the same as Tinian?
- Fitial: Because of Tinian. Yes.
- Siemer: I never was able to figure that out.
- Fitial: Yes. They were always arguing; their basic argument was, they've got to have at least one more than Tinian.
- Siemer: Not for practical political purposes of what they could do in the House of Representatives.
- Fitial: No. They just wanted the numbers. They kept arguing about [the U.S. Supreme Court requirements on equal representation] to cater to the desire of the Rotanese delegation. They want to have at least one more than Tinian.
- Siemer: Ben Manglona had ....
- Fitial: And they almost succeeded except that people like Jess Villagomez said the Legislature is too expensive, too costly. I think the first proposed composition was like 18....
- Siemer: It was something like 25, 8 and 3. It was very large. Before you went to public hearings?
- Fitial: Oh, yes, the first one was very, very large. But after we came back, it was I think 18-2-1 [18 representatives from Saipan; two representatives from Rota; one representative from Tinian].

- Siemer: And then there was a 16-2-1; then there was 12-1-1; and 14-2-1.
- Fitial: We finally adopted 12-1-1. That was the lowest we could go; they cannot go half [to give Tinian half a representative].
- Siemer: Ben Manglona had talked about walking out during the first part of the Convention, because you picked him up on it in a speech and you said nobody should be talking about walking out.
- Fitial: I condemned him, remember? I said: "Today, I rise to condemn . . ." I still remember.
- Siemer: You were very eloquent. But then you tempted young Ray Villagomez to get up and say: "If you're going to walk out, now's the time to do it. Go."
- Fitial: He did.
- Siemer: Ray Villagomez was not quite as eloquent as you were. He got right to the point and said, if you're going to walk out, just go. And that seemed to be a point at which there was quite a bit of tension, because Larry Guerrero immediately declared a recess.
- Fitial: That's right.
- Siemer: It seemed in the process that there were times when Larry Guerrero was concerned about how things were going. And it seemed that he would ask you to make a speech or try to get things back going on the floor, and that you were often speaking for him. Is that the case?
- Fitial: That's true.
- Siemer: Because he made a couple of speeches, but more often than not, you would show up and try to get things calmed down or get things on track again.
- Fitial: I'm related to Manglona, Benjamin.
- Siemer: You are?
- Fitial: I'm related to Prudencio, his brother.
- Siemer: How are you related to them?
- Fitial: Because they're part Taisican. Benjamin Taisican Manglona. My father is Taisican.
- Siemer: I didn't know that.
- Fitial: So I'm related to Benjamin, Prudencio, . . .
- Siemer: Leon Taisican?
- Fitial: Leon is my first cousin. And Felipe. Felipe is Leon's half brother.
- Siemer: Felipe Atalig.
- Fitial: Yes. So I'm related to them. And even up to now, we still are very, very close.
- Siemer: Did you think that Ben Manglona would walk out over something?
- Fitial: I never expected him to walk out.
- Siemer: Did not.
- Fitial: No.
- Siemer: Did you think anybody would walk out?
- Fitial: I mean at first, I never expected him to walk out. I never expected it, but it became clear

- already much later that if they don't get the executive powers to be delegated, they kept saying that over and over again.
- Siemer: But they didn't walk out over that. They threatened to walk out over that in the first half of the Convention, but they didn't do it.
- Fitial: They didn't. Except toward the last, because they were looking for ways for us to reconsider our decision.
- Siemer: Oh, on the executive branch.
- Fitial: On the executive branch, right.
- Siemer: Oh, I see.
- Fitial: We met more than two times but we were steadfast on our position to make the government centrally powerful.
- Siemer: Did you know at the time that if Ben Manglona walked out that some of the Rotanese would stay?
- Fitial: Yes. Because during the meetings, some of them already argued that we cannot decentralize the government because this is one government. Those words came from people like David Maratita, Pete Dela Cruz, David Atalig. These are all the ones who have made Saipan their permanent homes.
- Siemer: Those were all people, I was going to say, who worked and lived on Saipan. But then once that happened, then it was really over. Then all of the votes came in, everything was done, and you knew you were finished, right?
- Fitial: Yes.
- Siemer: Did you think at the outset you could do that in 50 days?
- Fitial: Not really. We were never mindful of the time limitation. We were only mindful before we started. But after we started, we were never concerned about time.
- Siemer: Then once the Convention concluded, did you work on the public education process?
- Fitial: Not actively.
- Siemer: Who from the Carolinian group did work on that?
- Fitial: I think we elected Pete Igitol to be actively involved in the political education.
- Siemer: How did that process work in the Carolinian community?
- Fitial: It was easy for us, for the Carolinians, because Carolinians were only situated in a few villages.
- Siemer: Which ones?
- Fitial: Chalan Kanoa District 4, District 7, Oleai, Garapan and Tanapag. That's all. There were no Carolinians residing in other villages except for those.
- Siemer: What was the feeling in the Carolinian community when the Constitution was finished and presented to people?
- Fitial: The feeling was nobody, not one Carolinian, came out publicly to speak against the document.
- Siemer: And was that true privately? People were satisfied?

- Fitial: Yes. They were satisfied. Those people who expressed satisfaction after the First Constitutional Convention, a lot of them came back after the Second Constitutional Convention and expressed dissatisfaction.
- Siemer: Really?
- Fitial: Because the Second Constitutional Convention was viewed as a legislature in session. They were not really looking into the Constitution to improve or add provisions of the Constitution. They were already legislating.
- Siemer: What do you think the principal issues will be this time in the Constitutional Convention coming up?
- Fitial: I think one major issue will be the land alienation. That would be on the order of business. Other than that, I personally feel that we should just rescind or repeal most of the amendments made during the Second Constitutional Convention. Just keep the integrity of the First Constitutional Convention. I'm not being biased, but I'm talking on the practical side or aspect of the Second Constitutional Convention. It really created more problems than it solved.
- Siemer: There seems to be some concern that this Constitutional Convention might do the same thing.
- Fitial: I don't think so.
- Siemer: Don't think so?
- Fitial: I don't think so. I'm going to run for that. I am personally against the constitutional convention. We shouldn't have a constitutional convention every ten years.
- Siemer: This concludes the interview. Thank you, Mr. Fitial, for your help.